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Subcultural Distinction in East Asian Education:

The Case of High School Rock in Taiwan

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Abstract

What kind of rock culture would grow out of an exam-oriented educational system? In the western rock world, self-learning has been characterized as most popular musicians' principal learning pattern, closely intertwined with the "DIY" ethos and the counter school culture. This research aims to present a different case, that of the "schooled" rock music in Taiwan. Over the last three decades, rock music in Taiwan has grown in popularity, while Taipei has gradually earned the reputation of being the "Mandarin pop/indie capital." In its developmental process, a few characteristics are worthy of the attention of both the Sociology of Education and youth cultural studies. Firstly, learning rock instruments in regular high school is the main route for teenagers to gain access to rock culture. Secondly, where elite students tend to devote more time to rock music activities than other students, their musical repertoire is characterized by producing covers of heavy metal tunes instead of song-writing.

This thesis will probe the rationale behind this phenomenon by answering the following questions: What can best explain the appeal of heavy rock to Taiwanese elite high school students? Why do they not write their own songs? Drawing upon data collected through a school ethnography, it is revealed that the ways Taiwanese elite high school students participate in musical activities can be best understood to be part of a subcultural milieu marked by the collective pursuit of "dual excellence in both study and play" (會玩又會唸書). In this symbolic space, the demanding technical requirements for acquiring several playing techniques allow rock to become a rankable sphere of activity in which elite students struggle for subcultural superiority according to measurable musical standards. The emphasis on instrumental virtuosity conforms to students' competitive disposition manufactured through academic exams. With these features, rock music becomes a particular form of subcultural activity which allows elite students to not only resist educational control, but also exert symbolic violence over peers of lower-ranked high schools by showing technical superiority.

This thesis extends the CCCS's subcultural solution to the analysis of "subcultural distinction". In distinction to the "internal perspective" of Sarah Thornton's conception of subcultural capital (1995), a more holistic framework is

developed to explore the relationship between the wider patterns of social division, young people's subcultural participation, and the shaping of the value hierarchy both within and outside the subcultural sphere. Further, the thesis explores the educational system's active role in shaping youth subcultures. I demonstrate how education in Taiwan is institutionally mediated by the exam regime to be a powerful logic of social differentiation, and the ways young people's subcultural choices are constrained by their educational career advance from high school to university. The study also has important implications for the educational policy making in Taiwan. By looking at how students "play," I propose a new exploratory route to illuminate the widespread impact of the exam-oriented educational system on students' creativity and identity formation.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained here is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Chi-Chung Wang

Table of Contents

Part I	5
Positioning the research.....	5
Chapter 1	7
Introduction.....	7
The Point of Departure.....	7
Rock, Styles, and the Subcultural Distinction of the Academic Elite.....	12
Youth, Popular Music, and Cultural Production: From Subcultural Resistance to Cultural Distinction.....	18
Theoretical Frameworks	32
Chapter Summaries	37
Chapter 2	41
Methodology	41
The Original Research Design.....	41
Methods of Data Collection	43
The School Ethnography in KCRC.....	44
The Investigational Turn of the Research	50
The Advantage of School Ethnography	56
Other Approaches.....	57
Ethical Issues	58
Part II.....	61
Context and history	61
Chapter 3	63
Elite High Schools and Taiwanese Education.....	63
The Structural Genesis of the Hierarchization of Senior High Education.....	64
Screening Mechanism: Joint Examination and the Production of Ranking	67
Elite High Schools in Taiwanese Society	71
The Rise of Student Club Culture and the Collective Pursuit of “Dual Excellence in both Play and Study”	73

Marking the Difference: The Subcultural Practices of Elite High School Students	78
Concluding Remarks.....	84
Chapter 4	85
The Formation of the Rock Field in Taiwan.....	85
Infrastructure, Careers, and Public Reception of Rock in Taiwan (1949–95) ...	85
Rock and the Cold War	85
The Industrialization of Popular Music Production and the Rise of Commercial Rock and Session Musicians.....	88
The Rise of Consumer Society and the Development of Rock Infrastructure.....	91
The Advent of the Yamaha Band Battle and the Legitimization of Rock.....	97
Concluding Remarks.....	103
Chapter 5	105
The Formation of the High School Rock Field in Taiwan.....	105
Professional Conventions, the Cult of Instrumental Virtuosity, and the Rise of the High School Rock Field.....	105
Yamaha Band Battle and the Cult of Instrumental Virtuosity.....	105
The Hierarchical Ladder of Musical Career Development and Ideal Musicianship	109
Instrument Virtuosity as Symbolic Capital	114
The Growing Popularity of Rock and the Rise of Student Clubs	121
The Dominant Status of Professional Musicianship in the Teaching/Learning System	126
Part III	129
Ethnography and analysis.....	129
Chapter 6	131
The School, the Exam, and Rock: The Structural Condition of Youth Rock Culture in Taiwan	131
KC High School Rock Club: A Brief Background	131
The Structural Advantage of Students of Elite High Schools.....	138
The Predicament of Non-Elite High School Students	144
The Advantages of A Longer History	146
A Different Model of Youth Subculture in the Exam-Oriented Educational System: All Starts	

from within the School.....	148
Chapter 7	151
Rock, Metal, and the Subcultural Distinction of Elite Students.....	151
More than an Extra-curricular Club: The Rock Subculture in KCRC.....	152
The Broader Subcultural Milieu: Symbolic Resistance through Pursuing Leisure	
Achievement	154
Disinterestedness, Symbolic Resistance and Symbolic Profit.....	157
Heavy Metal, Instrumental Virtuosity, and Subcultural Distinction.....	162
Replication: Exam Culture to Rock Subculture.....	166
How Subcultural Choices were Framed: The Interplay between Educational Career and	
Leisure Career.....	172
Conclusion	174
Chapter 8	177
On Becoming A Member	177
The Pattern of the Senior/Junior Relation in KCRC.....	179
Training to Be Obedient.....	183
Daily Music Training Mechanisms.....	195
Watch Yourself! Big Brother Is Watching You	201
Becoming a Member: the Rite of Passage in the “Semester Trial”	206
Conclusion	211
Chapter 9	213
The Market of Inter-School Exchange: An Unequal Distributional System of	
Peer Recognition	213
The Nature of the Stakes in the High School Rock Field: The Market of Peer Recognition	214
The Conversion of Daily Effort into Reputation: Audience Mobilization	215
Dynamics in the Field: School Rank and the Gap in Audience Mobilization	222
The Hidden Factor: The Social Alchemy of the “School Title”	231
The Structure of Complicity: The Deceptive Nature of Gift Exchange in Inter-School	
Exchange.....	237
Concluding Remarks: A System of Double Consecration	240
Chapter 10	245

Conclusion: Subcultural Distinction in the Exam-Oriented Educational System	
.....	245
Further Implications: Subcultural Distinction, the Relative Autonomy of Education in	
Shaping Cultural Distinction, and Exam-Oriented Education in Taiwan	249
Bibliography	267

Part I

Positioning the research

Chapter 1

Introduction

The Point of Departure

In a local high school in Taipei, KC High School, at the beginning of the after-school hours, a group of students assembled in a regular classroom. Some carried with them instruments like electric guitars or basses, while others carried just their schoolbags. The difference in status among the students was easily recognized. Those who sat silently on the school chairs were the “fish” who had just begun their high school life, whereas those who appeared relaxed and stood chatting freely with each other at the front of the classroom were the second-year students. As the bell rang at 5 p.m., one second-year student requested all the junior members to sit properly, and then handed out slips of paper for them to fill in some basic personal information: “Okay *shieu-di* [juniors],¹ we want your name, class number, and your instrument choice; put all these down on the paper please,” says the club leader, Lee, one of the best bassists in the club.

One of the vocalists, Huang, began the club induction: “Now we are about to introduce our club, the Rock Club. In general, we play the kinds of music which are relevant to rock, sometimes we might even play jazz if you want.”

“And metal,” one second-year student, Lin, added.

“Yeah, metal too,” Huang continued. “In principal, there are five instrumental positions, guitar, bass, drum, vocal, and keyboard. You can make your own choice based on your interest. Now I’ll pass you over to our vice-leader, Chen.”

“Okay,” said Chen:

Since you chose to join the rock club, you need to be aware that, for example, it

¹ In Mandarin, *shieu-di* means junior course mate. It is a combination of “*shieu*,” which refers to learning, and “*di*,” which refers to younger brother. The latter can be replaced by “*jang*,” which means older brother, to refer to a senior course mate. In the schooling context of Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea (in Japan and South Korea there are different terms for the roles in similar relationship), the use of these titles in daily interaction implies a hierarchical relationship between students of different year grades, and the junior students are expected to respect and even be obedient to senior students.

is impossible for you to be musically strong without making the resolution to dedicate yourself to practicing. If you just want to treat it as a kind of extracurricular or leisure activity, then we will ask you to leave. You can come to the club office at any time to practice—the lunch-break time, after-school hours, and all day on the weekends. Many of us even bunk off to practice our instruments. The most significant thing in this club is your ‘attitude.’ That is to say, if you only want to spend an hour a day to come to practice, and then go home to chat online with girls, then this is not the place for you.

The vice-leader kept on talking about the issue of the “proper manners” in the junior members’ daily encounters with the senior members:

And then, regarding the proper form for greeting the senior members, the basic requirement is, be sincere, and to show your respect to the senior. You may have heard that in this club we need to bow to the seniors; in fact, there is no written rule about this, nor is it compulsory—we do so only because we truly respect our senior members.

Another second-year student, Hsiao, continued on the issue of balance between club activity and academic studies:

Also, I need to warn you beforehand, do not use academic pressure or cram school lessons as excuses for the lack of practicing. Many of you may have heard that the cost of joining the rock club is the sacrifice of your studies. This is ridiculous, only those who give up themselves will end with crappy academic marks. In fact, you certainly can look after both sides—it is nothing more than a matter of time management. Many of our ex-club leaders are studying in the medical schools of several elite universities now.

Vice-leader Chen then spoke again:

One last thing: I just mentioned the significance of attitude. This especially means that, if you have the right attitude, then there will be no problem for you at all,

and none of us will give you a hard time. If, at a certain moment you feel that we are giving you a hard time, the only possible situation is that there is something wrong with your attitude. Once you can get with this, then by next year, I bet all of you will become fucking awesome student rockers.

The description above is the quote from the talk delivered by the senior members to the first-year students in the induction event of KC High School's rock club. On September 5, 2012, the rock club of KC High School (KCRC, hereafter) had its first induction session for the school's new arrivals. Like the freshmen in many other high schools, after their first experience in the national high school entrance exam, these first-year students finally entered into high school life. However, there was something which marked them out as different from students in other schools. Based upon their excellent exam results, these students were now in one of Taiwan's best high schools and hoping to join the rock club which was, according to local knowledge, publicly recognized as the best in Taiwan's high school rock field. Some of them might just be curious about what rock music is, some might have been dreaming of playing this genre in high school after years of hard study in the junior high schools, while others might have heard about KCRC's great reputation in the world of high school rock clubs. Unsurprisingly, some students appeared to be doubtful—they might be forgiven for thinking they had entered the army rather than a high school rock club. As for the themes which were emphasized in the induction—such as “discipline,” “austerity,” “manners and obedience to the senior members,” “competition,” and “school honor”—none of these could be said to be relevant to the usually perceived image in the everyday language of rock. On the other hand, neither would they probably be aware of the fact that “playing rock in and for the school (and an elite one in particular)” might be unusual in the history of rock.

What kind of rock culture would grow out of an exam-oriented educational system? In contemporary youth culture, rock music is usually portrayed as a rebellious cultural form distant from mundane life patterns, which often accompanies a strong sense of antagonism towards the control culture and the schooling system. This is generally echoed in some cases of young rock fans' tendency to mark themselves off from these “mundane aspects” in their social life via consuming, playing, and producing rock music. This is certainly the case in some of the relevant literatures in

rock and popular music studies (see, for examples, Bennet, 2000; Cohen, 1991; Fornäs et al., 1995; Grossberg, 1984). Here, the assumption has been that rock music is potentially a pool of cultural resources for the youth to break away from the dominant ideas embodied in the institutions of social control, such as the family, school, work, or the legal system. In distinction to this widely accepted image of rock in the daily culture of western society, this research aims to present a very different story of rock—one that focuses on the case of rock in Taiwanese schools.

From the 1970s onwards, Taiwan has been (along with Hong Kong) a central hub of popular music in the Mandarin-speaking world. Particularly after the opening-up of the People's Republic of China, the rapid growth of the consumer market of Mandarin popular music gradually threatened the space of Cantonese popular music and “created a space for Taiwan to become a center for Mandarin-Chinese music production” (Huat, 2004: 204). Particularly after the 1990s, to quote a widespread saying in the popular music industry across different countries and areas in this region, “popularity in Taiwan has been the very premise for any new artist seeking success in the Chinese-speaking market” (Lin, 2013). Although in recent years the island has experienced a mild decline in its economic growth, the status of Taiwan as the central hub of Mandarin popular music production still remains (despite increasing worries of how to maintain its superiority in the face of the growing rivalries, with the rise of the popular music industry in China). According to the box-office ranking charts issued by China International Performing Arts Trading Center, in the Chinese market of live musical events, for example, seven out of the top ten were taken by Taiwanese artists and bands in 2012;² in 2013, the Taiwanese rock band Mayday and two other Taiwanese artists, Jay Chow and Show Lo, respectively took the top three places on the chart, while the box office of Mayday reached 7.7 million New Taiwan Dollars (approximately GB£170,000) (Ma, 2014: 134–5).

Among these artists, Mayday is widely known as the most successful group, one of the very few artists and bands that can pack out the largest venue in China, the Beijing Olympic Stadium, which holds 200,000 people (B'in Music, 30 April 2012). However, Mayday means much more than its commercial achievement in the huge consumer market of China to the realms of both education and popular music. In

² Including the Mayday band, Wang Leehom, A Mei, the Rock Records' 30th anniversary concert, Jam Hsiao, Jolin Tsai, and the Sodagreen band.

Taiwan, Mayday represents an enviable trajectory of “becoming famous” for local student bands. In the local history of popular music development, Mayday is the first student band formed in the guitar club of an academically elite high school which obtained unprecedented market success by playing rock music. Behind this extraordinary achievement, however, Mayday members’ early history can be said to be very similar to the majority of Taiwanese rock musicians: they learned to play rock instruments and started a band with club members to play covers music in their high school guitar or rock club; once the members began to study in universities, the band gradually transforms from a covers band to an original band. Apart from Mayday, the majority of renowned Taiwanese bands also progressed through similar path, i.e., from school rock clubs in regular schools.

In the field of popular music production in Taiwan, student clubs on school campuses are significant sites for the music industry to look for and find new talent. During the last twenty years, as rock music has grown in popularity on this island, more and more high school students have been attracted to join rock-oriented school music clubs and learn to play rock instruments. With the organizational connection to different divisions in the popular music industry, the high school rock club has been incorporated as the basic unit for the reproduction of rock and popular music talents.³ Moreover, since the 1990s, the development of the field of rock in Taiwan has been marked by a process of gradual “eliticization.” In the popular music scene, the majority of famous Taiwanese bands, including Mayday, Sodagreen, 1976, Echo, Tizzy Bac, Go Chic, etc, all originated from the academically elite schools⁴. At the level of high school rock, on the other hand, the musical performance of elite high school students is also widely recognized as top among all the high school students; with the energy and time dedicated to rock music activities generally more extensive than that of non-elite students.⁵

As both an ex-member of the popular music scene in Taiwan and a sociological

³ According to my survey (n=201) in one of the most famous rock festivals in Taiwan, *Spring Scream*, the one with the most performing bands in Taiwan, nearly 78 percent of musicians have learned and participated to play rock instrument in university and high school rock clubs, whilst around 60 percent of musicians had learned in high school rock clubs. To learn to play in high school rock clubs has almost become the compulsory education for local youth to first access to rock music.

⁴ Yahoo Taiwan Celebrity, February 9, 2012.

⁵ See Chapters 6, 7 and 9.

researcher, to me this particular phenomenon posed some fundamental puzzles—since rock music is often ideologically linked to a series of seemingly rebellious qualities in its context of origin, why and how has this cultural form become a genre strongly associated with the academically elite group in the exam-oriented educational system in Taiwan? How can we best make sense of this problematic association?

Beginning with these questions, this thesis aims to unravel the problematic relationship between the particular pattern of rock culture, the academically elite group, and the exam-oriented educational system in Taiwan. Drawing upon data collected through a school ethnography, I argue that the field of rock in the academically oriented high school world supplies not only a social space for students to develop musical competence and a collectively shared subculture, but also an “arena” extended from the academic exam for status struggle. An isomorphic relationship between students’ rock activities and the exam culture is identified: where the emphasis on instrumental virtuosity and playing fast solo in heavy metal conforms to students’ competitive disposition, the way students play instruments shares exactly the same logic as the way they prepare for academic exam. Broadly speaking, I intend that this thesis will shed light on the widespread impact of the exam-oriented education system on students’ learning practice, creativity, sense of accomplishment, and identity formation in broader spheres of everyday activity.

Before introducing the research questions and the theoretical frameworks of this study, in what follows I want to provide a brief account of the contextual background to mark out the problematic relationship between musical styles, ways of playing/learning music, the pattern of the student subculture, and the local educational regime in the case of this research.

Rock, Styles, and the Subcultural Distinction of the Academic Elite

In the history of popular music in the West, the relationship between rock and the schooling system is under-studied. Although there had been the particular examples of the impact of art school education on the development of British rock music (Frith and Horne, 1987), or how college radio contributed to the formation of the “college rock” genre in the 1980s US indie scene (Hibbett, 2005: 58), regular school (as in contrast

to the vocational- or professional-based schooling system, such as art school) has rarely been perceived as the crucial mechanism for nurturing rock musicians. With the exception of a few cases (Blake, 1996; Paynter, 1982), studies have shown that popular music is generally overlooked in the musical pedagogy of the regular educational system, as classical music is prioritized more in this kind of learning setting (Bennett, 2001; Finnegan, 1989). In her study *How Popular Musicians Learn*, Lucy Green argues the overriding learning practice of young popular musicians in the UK usually proceeds in a peer-directed situation “in the absence of a teacher, lecturer, curriculum, syllabus, or system of assessment” (Green, 2002: 216). On the other hand, as a cultural form which appeals mainly to the adolescent group, rock is more often presented as a pool of (sub)cultural resources for students to mark themselves off from the schooling environment’s bureaucratic control (Fornas et al, 1995; Brehony, 1998; Grossberg, 1992, 1997). In contrast to these descriptions, the role that rock plays in local high school students’ life in Taiwan brings a crucial difference: in Taiwan, students’ musical practice is strongly connected to their sense of collective honor based upon their school identity, which is embedded in the exam-oriented education system. As already stated, many famous Taiwanese bands all originated from the academically elite schools. Many of them have more than once displayed explicit sense of belonging and identity to the school where they embarked their musical journey, and attributed their musical achievement to their schooling experience. For example, members of the Mayday band have cited that their schooling experience in their high school,⁶ the Affiliated High School of National Taiwan Normal University (the second-best high school in Taipei), as a great influence on their musical career, as “the liberal atmosphere in the school makes it a significant birth place for student bands” (Chen, 2007).

The presence of such “eliticization” in the rock field also relates to a common but not yet widely studied phenomenon in the popular and academic literatures on

⁶ Similarly, another influential band, Echo, also mentioned several times in the interviews how their musical experience in their university rock club, the Echo Club in National Tsing Hua University, one of the top universities in Taiwan, is of great significance to their musical journey. Members of Echo band, (2011) Interview with Echo band. Retrieved from <http://www.biosmonthly.com/contactd.php?id=5132>; The Secretary of National Tsing-hua University (October 8, 2014), The Super Cool Band Hatched by Top University. Retrieved from <http://www.nthu.edu.tw/newsphoto/103news/hotnews-1031008.php>.

Taiwan's local youth subcultures. In the areas which had once been labeled as rebellious and problematic subcultures such as rock music or street dance (see Chapters 3 and 4), students in the elite high schools generally spend more time in club activities than those of non-elite high schools. In the elite high schools, it is almost an obligation for each member to spend extra time and money taking instrument lessons in music shops, as elite students generally hold that it is each member's responsibility to contribute to maintaining the school club's honor by enhancing their playing techniques.

Their strong dedication, and the specific and almost unprecedented ways the students engage with rock pose a series of new questions for youth cultural studies, cultural sociology and the sociology of education. On the one hand, in some aspects the students' rock practice does reflect a certain degree of rebelliousness which is somewhat parallel to the commonly perceived patterns of the relationship between youth and rock in the West. For examples, it has long been a widely known fact that the enthusiastic rockers in these schools often "bunk off" from their school course to practice their instruments or conduct band rehearsals; their strong dedication to practicing instruments and hence the acquisition of virtuosic skills allowed them to resist the traditional expectation that they only need to focus on obtaining success as imposed by the exam-oriented educational system. However, such rebelliousness is often accompanied by a series of phenomena which seem symbolically contradictory. The first remarkable difference is that all this happens in the most prestigious and elite high schools in Taiwan, and the way students engage in rock activity strongly connects to their school identity. For students, to excel at playing rock instruments is also a way to demonstrate that they are genuinely elite, as a sign that matches their academic status as students of the country's top high school. Most strikingly, the way these students engage in their rock activity is framed within an authoritative relation which is widespread in Taiwan's militarist culture, that is, the hierarchical relation between upper-year students and lower-year students.⁷ Students believe that such a relationship is necessary for effective instrument learning, and that it symbolizes their strong commitment to rock activities ("we are willing to endure the austere training for our

⁷ In such a social relation, junior students need to obey senior members, along with a series of interactional codes which ensures the hierarchical relationship between them (as the requirement of bow-taking quoted in the beginning of this chapter; or see Chapter 8).

love of rock!”).

As for the content of the musical practice, while genre diversity has substantially increased in the local field of popular music production, there have been sharp simplifications of musical taste marked by the popularity of heavy metal and hard rock in the high school rock field, with particular emphasis on playing speed and techniques such as guitar *shredding*,⁸ *bass slapping*,⁹ and *blast beat*.¹⁰ Under these circumstances, music making only takes a peripheral position in their musical practice in the learning system of this music field. That is to say, students rarely write their own songs, but are encouraged (in some cases, may be “required”) to invest a significant amount of time and energy in learning to play particular kinds of songs marked by a strong emphasis on instrumental virtuosity. Such a collective tendency is often connected with distinctively competitive discourses; this is strikingly homologous to the rationale behind the academic competition when taking exams: to “make progress” as soon as one can in order to “surpass” the students of other schools and maintain the leading position of their club in the arena of high school rock.

Based on these particularities, this study aims to present an ethnographic understanding of the formation and operation of youth and rock culture in Taiwan by examining the following questions: How can we best explain the homology between Taiwan’s elite students’ enthusiasm in instrument practice, the ways they learn, and their academic practice? How has rock become a cultural form for Taiwan’s academically elite students to display both their rebelliousness and “(sub)cultural superiority”? In what social universe, and how, can rock music be treated as a specific sphere in which musicians can compete with each other and mark out the strong from

⁸ A virtuoso lead guitar playing style marked by the deployment of techniques (including sweep, alternate and tremolo picking, string skipping, and multi-finger tapping) which is usually carried out at a fast speed.

⁹ “An effect known as slapping used on the electric bass guitar involves the player slapping the string with the side of the thumb and “popping” higher strings with the index or middle finger, creating a very rhythmic, percussive sound, characteristic particularly of funk and funk-rock” (Oxford Music Online, retrieved from http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/51117?q=slap&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit).

¹⁰ A drum beat generally comprises a repeated, sixteenth-note figure played at a very fast tempo, and divided uniformly among the bass drum, snare, and ride, crash, or hi-hat cymbal.

the weak? How can rock be comparable and “rankable”? Why do elite high school students in Taiwan tend to spend more time and energy on their rock activities? What can best explain the appeal of heavy rock to them, and why don’t they write their own songs?

The main aim of this research is to explore the intricate relationship between two thematic issues that can be found simultaneously in the rock activity of elite high school students in Taiwan: the specific patterns of *cultural distinction* and *subcultural resistance*. This will be done by combining the theoretical concerns of both Bourdieu’s analysis on the relationship between structural conditioning and cultural taste, and the subcultural theorists’ focus on the meaning and social function of specific forms of subcultural practice. Bourdieu’s cultural distinction is derived from the idea of the superior taste of “high culture” (DiMaggio, 1987: 443) and is often linked to the bourgeois game of status discrimination. The traditional sense of subcultures mainly refers to those—mostly categorized as “low culture”—which are appropriated by the deprived social groups as resistant repertoires devised in response to the dominant value. In the most rigorous sense, the core elements in these two frameworks seem to be in contrast to each other and hardly likely to co-exist. In my own view, however, such contrast is relevant to some methodological bias in relevant studies. Firstly, while CCCS theorists tend to focus more on economically deprived young people, in most of their studies the social meaning of youth culture is interpreted as equivalent to the resistance of subordinate youth against hegemonic culture, while not leaving much room for valences other than resistance. Secondly, the rigid differentiation between the high/low culture in Bourdieu’s analysis of the patterns of cultural distinction hinders him in recognizing that some types of “low culture” can also be appropriated by elite groups to distinguish themselves from others, securing cultural distinction. The distinctive properties of the rock subculture of the academically elite students in the exam-oriented educational system in Taiwan allow me to explore the intricate relationship between these two valences presented in students’ subcultural practice.

In the process of the transmission of western cultural forms (classical music, popular music, rock music, and so forth) into the East Asian context, the original value, meaning and hierarchy would be translated into localized patterns and thus somewhat diverged from the original patterns in their western context. For example, while some certain genres in rock might originally be placed as forms of leisure for audiences

marked by lower economic or educational background, in East Asia they become specific “foreign cultures” which need specific cultural capitals (English, instrument ability) to decode in the process of cultural reception.

In the case of the UK, for instance, rock music has been a ubiquitous cultural form ever since after its arrival in the mid-1950s. As Lucy Green illustrates, playing an instrument is no longer an example of conflict between young musicians and their parents. Indeed, many young musicians first start playing with their parents’ instruments, and can easily access the tricks of the trade by learning from parents, friends, neighbors, and classmates in informal settings (Green, 2008). However, in the case of Taiwan, the transplantation of rock music involves the problem of how to learn the western cultural form through a non-western system/field (of local politics, institution, organization, cultural knowledge, and of the self). While there is a serious lack of social acceptance and collective understanding of the knowledge and techniques in playing popular music instruments in the parental generation, schools (particularly those elite schools in which students are better equipped to decode foreign culture) thus become the central hub for local youth to access rock music knowledge and performance. Through such a process, they turn into the cultural elements greatly homologous to the patterns of what I term the “subcultural distinction” (see the next section, and Chapters 7 and 10) of elite students in the social universe of the everyday schooling in which they are situated.

On the other hand, the academically elite students also suffer from the traditional educational expectation that they only need focus on obtaining exam success as many other students do. In such a social dynamic, their commitment to rock activities and dedication to the acquisition of instrumental virtuosity are also subcultural strategies for them to resist such expectation. Distinct from the narrowly defined “subcultural resistance” as depicted by the CCCS theorists, the possession of a higher amount of socially recognized capital allows the academically elite students to obtain symbolic profit and secure cultural distinction in the broader society through subcultural participation. Through this analysis, the thesis aims to develop an analytical framework which allows us to explore the complex social dynamic in the relationship between the field position, the possession of specific types of capital, and the specific social value and meaning in the way young people participate in subcultural activities.

The case in this research also reflects another problem in the aforementioned

literatures on culture: the role of education is either seriously underestimated, or is often reduced to merely the consequence or the intermediary mechanism which is predisposed by other social differences such as social class, ethnicity, race, or gender. For me, this line of reasoning seriously neglects the relative autonomy of education institutions, and comes up short in looking at the active role that education might play in shaping cultural struggle. Especially in East Asian societies, while exams are extremely significant in shaping the distribution system (that is, job opportunity, revenue, reputation, status), the role that education plays in everyday life can be said to be as significant as other social differences such as social class and gender (in some circumstances, the role of education might even be labeled as the *most* important social difference). By presenting the case of rock music in schools in Taiwan, I demonstrate how education can be a relatively autonomous sorting mechanism that contributes to particular contours and contents of cultural distinction and specific forms of youth subculture that cannot be illuminated by other social differences.

Youth, Popular Music, and Cultural Production: From Subcultural Resistance to Cultural Distinction

In the following sections, I will critically address the available theoretical tools for the studies on the intersections of youth culture and popular music by looking at:

- subcultural perspective,
- scene perspective,
- Howard Becker's theory of "art worlds," and
- Bourdieu's theory of the "field of cultural production."

These four tools are the most commonly adopted frameworks in the studies of popular culture. I will first address each perspective in respective sections, which will begin with an outline of their theory, the sort of questions they might ask, and examples of these perspectives' usage in empirical researches. I will also critically examine their merits, as well as their limitations, in terms of both the consistency of their account and their usefulness to my own concern. In the final section, I will formulate a

theoretical dialogue to examine the possible ways to utilize their merits and to adjust their limitations for this research, and further propose the theoretical frameworks of this thesis.

Subcultures as Solutions to the Conditions of Existence

The foundations of the sociological research of youth subcultures can be traced back to the studies on youth delinquency developed by the Chicago School during the 1920s. At the time, the common ideas of youth delinquency were dominated by the psychologically based individualistic criminology which considered young people's deviant behaviors as the consequence of criminal personality. Based on an interactionist perspective, the Chicago School's sociologists challenged such an explanation by arguing that juvenile delinquency could be seen as normal responses of the social actor to a socially situated context¹¹ (Sapsford, 1981; Whyte, 1943). Later in the post-war period, US society experienced an economic boom; however, the post-war affluence brought by this economic development was not accompanied by a drop in the crime rate—instead, diverse forms of youth crime increased. It was in this context, as Andy Bennett notes, that “a number of different models were offered by Chicago theorists to explain how deviant subcultures function to normalize particular forms of deviant behavior” (Bennett, 2000: 15). Among these studies, Howard Becker's “labeling theory” (1963) can be said to be the most influential model for the studies of youth delinquency. By this model, he argues that the subcultural deviance is the product of social labeling, which is generated by the rules created by moral entrepreneurs (both rule creators and rule enforcers) to be applied to particular persons or peripheral groups who are thus labeled as outsiders. With the process of labeling, the committed actor would be placed into an interactive situation in which acts of deviance or crime would more inclined to be adopted by s/he in response to the constrained situation. Such a labeling effect is evident in the situation, for example, “when a prison record makes it harder to earn a living at a conventional occupation and so disposes its possessor to move into an illegal one” (Becker, 1963: 179).

¹¹ This approach was common in several studies of the situational interaction in particular institutional context, the most famous case being Goffman's studies on the seemingly irrational behaviors of the inmates in response to the constrained conditions in asylums (Goffman, 1961).

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, the Chicago School's approach of subcultural deviance was adopted and further developed to make sense of the thriving youth subculture in post-war Britain. In particular, this approach was adapted by the theorists of Birmingham's Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS, hereafter) to combine the Marxist theoretical concern of class struggle to develop a model of subcultural resistance. Similar to US society, post-war Britain also experienced rapid economic growth; with the advancement of mass production technology and increasing affluence, young people's spending power gradually increased and led to the growth of consumerism. In this context, many working-class youth, who had once been considered as lacking spending power, developed a series of style-based subcultures through specific patterns of consumption which seemed to break Britain's traditional class differentiation.

In making sense of such an unprecedented phenomenon, scholars argued that "the post-war economic prosperity and the concomitant consumer boom acted to erode traditional class distinctions as working-class consumers effectively bought into the lifestyle of the middle classes" (Bennett, 2000: 18). However, the CCCS's theorists rejected this explanation, contending that post-war affluence in fact "assumed the proportions of a full-blown ideology" that functioned to cover the still-existing class gap and "dismantled working-class resistance and delivered the 'spontaneous consent' of the class to the authority of the dominant classes" (Clarke et al., 2006: 30). To the CCCS scholars, the diverse patterns of cultural consumption enacted by working-class youth in post-war Britain were a series of subcultural responses to their conditions of existence. By following the Gramscian Marxist theoretical concern of *hegemonic struggle*, the CCCS's theorists adapted the Chicago School's model of subcultural deviance—particularly Becker's model—to the class struggle of British working-class youth in the context of everyday life, and further developed a theoretical framework of *subcultural resistance*. In this framework, patterns of subcultural repertoires—dress, lifestyle, activities, and leisure pursuits—are treated as ritualistic gestures deployed by young adults as different cultural responses to the problems and class conditions which they share with other members (parents and peers, for instances) of their particular class.

This model problematizes the particular configuration of the social context in which the subculture has taken shape, the social meaning and function of diverse forms

of subcultural repertoires, and the accompanied social consequences caused by these subcultural activities. In his study on a white, male-based youth group in a London East End working-class community, for example, Phil Cohen strongly emphasized that the youth subculture should be seen as a particular response to the disintegration of traditional working-class community which had been caused by urban redevelopment in the 1950s, as the subculture functioned to “retrieve some of the socially cohesive elements destroyed in their parent’s culture” (Cohen, 1972: 23). Similarly, the particular forms of consumption, use of stylistic objects, and drug use could be appropriated by Hebdige’s Mods in a bid for symbolic victory which functioned to compensate for their daytime frustration in schools or workplaces. Thus:

... the scooter, a formerly ultra-respectable means of transport was appropriated and converted into a weapon and symbol of solidarity. Thus pills, medically diagnosed for the treatment of neuroses, were appropriated and used as an end-in-themselves, and the negative evaluations of their capabilities imposed by school and work were substituted by a positive assessment of their personal credentials in the world of play. (Hebdige, 2006: 76)

Members of a particular subculture, on the one hand, share a series of specific values, types of activities, ways of using material objects, and territorial spaces which make them distinct from other members of the parent culture; on the other hand, the subculture also shares great similarities, and encounters similar problems, with the parent culture, given the former is a subset of the latter. Therefore, for instance, Paul Willis argues that the anti-authoritarian repertoires in the counter-school culture of the lads—including bunking-off, fighting, pulling pranks, smoking, and dressing—are creative forms of resistance derived from the elements from the shop-floor culture: informal groups, masculine chauvinism, struggle for control of time use, and a disdain for theoretical knowledge (Willis, 1981).

However, precisely because the majority of subcultural responses to problematic experiences are highly ritualized, stylized forms only to be found at the symbolic level, they usually “solve, but in an imaginary way, [that] which at the concrete level remain[s] unresolved” (Clarke et al., 2006: 37). This, as stated earlier, is evident in the Mods’ collective endeavor in the search for the symbolic victory in the world of play.

What is even more, through a series of ritualistic practices which are closely related to the parent culture, they might serve an ideological function to socialize the youth “into a class identity and position” (ibid.: 35) and hence facilitate reproduction of the *status quo*. The case of the counter-school culture in Paul Willis’s study on working-class youth once again best illustrates such a function. In this study, Willis revisits a classic Marxist question of “how working-class kids get working-class jobs” (Willis, 1981: 1). Through probing the subcultural activities of the lads in their everyday life, he reveals that the counter-school cultural repertoires allow the lads to “penetrate” how the capitalist educational regime exerts control on them through school demands. However, there are also “limitations” in their cultural penetration (ibid.: 119): although the aforementioned elements in the working-class culture allow them to reject school control, these elements also serve the ideological function which accustoms the lads to shop-floor culture and makes them more inclined to aspire to do working-class jobs.

The CCCS’s model provides a useful framework to analyze the collective cultural practice of youth groups. It guides us, by looking at the peculiar configuration of the social context and relevant webs of meaning in which the youth are situated, to make sense of the socio-psychological drive which triggers them to adopt particular sets of subcultural repertoires, as well as their relationship to the accompanied structural condition. On the other hand, it also problematizes the social function of peculiar patterns of subcultural practice, and the resulting social consequences and impacts on the *status quo*. Despite of all these benefits, this perspective has still been criticized in several dimensions. Firstly, it is widely argued that the CCCS’s model is too class-centered, and tends to equate youth subcultures with the everyday resistance displayed by the white, male, working-class youths, which means the CCCS’s approach ignores other dimensions such as gender differences (see, for example, McRobbie and Garber, 2006) or local variations (Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 2004). Moreover, it is argued that CCCS’s model looks only at tight, coherent subcultures shared by homogeneous groups based on the post-war British context, and hence fails to capture the apparently increasing fragmentation and fluidity in diverse forms of youth cultures that emerged after the 1980s (Webb, 2007; Redhead, 1990; Thornton, 1995). Many later theorists attempt to conceptualize the less structurally bounded formation of youth cultures in an increasingly globalized situation by developing concepts such as “tribes,” “scenes,” and “milieus.” In particular, given the increasingly

significant role of locality in shaping the relationship between youth and cultural forms in the late-modern era marked by the entanglement between the globalization and localization, the “scene perspective” has become the most popular framework for analyzing the formation and operation of popular-cultural space. In what follows, I will turn our focus to briefly address this perspective, and critically assess how useful it might be, as well as the possible flaws, for this research.

Studies of Popular Music and the “Scene Perspective”

In the recent development of popular music studies, the “scene perspective” has gradually replaced the dominant status of subcultural analysis and become a widely adopted approach. The uses of the idea of “scene” are usually based on the contrast to the use of “subculture” or “community,” as the latter two tend to focus on a singular cultural activity shared by a homogeneous group, and fail to capture the often fluid, divergent, hybridized nature of cultural production within the context of late-modern society. The concept was first used by musical journalists, and further used by the participants of popular music to refer to cultural practices based on the particular location in specific period (Peterson and Bennett, 2004). Since it has long been extensively used in both academic and non-academic situations, as argued by Olson, most usages usually take the term for granted, and treat it as either one that is interchangeable with the term “subculture,” or as “the mere backdrop for what supposedly really matters” (Olson, 1991: 270).

It was only beginning in the 1990s that there had been some academic efforts in theorizing the scene concept. In order to stress this diverse facade of musical production and the complicated process in which it is activated, Will Straw provides a widely cited definition of scene: “cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization” (Straw 1991: 372). Straw sees the formation and transformation of popular music as both a local and trans-local phenomena, and emphasizes the fluid, cosmopolitan and constantly changing nature of popular music scenes. By this usage, he illustrates the way that the North American rock and dance scenes were constructed by the coalition and alliance between different social groups through the affective link marked by their shared

musical preferences (Straw, 1991).

In her ethnographic work, Cohen also examines the way that local settings of the city of Liverpool contribute to the features of the development of the Liverpool rock scene. For Cohen, the Liverpool rock scene is shaped by its locality. Liverpool's role as a port had been a significant background for the import of rock music, and local migrants also contribute to the production of particular sound and styles. This not only reflects the trajectory of social development of its local setting, but also actively shapes Liverpool's social, cultural and economic life (Cohen, 1991). Furthermore, Cohen stresses music production in the context of everyday life. Through detailed ethnographic observation on local musicians' daily interactions, she reveals how local conditions (including an economic slump and high unemployment rate), provide meaning and motivation for local musicians to engage in their rock practice, and how their musical lives oscillate between the fantasy driven by the rock stardom ideology and the reality of the music industry (ibid, 1991).

Cohen clearly illustrates how the development of the Liverpool rock scene was propelled and shaped by the interconnectedness of locality and global phenomena. On the other hand, in an era characterized by the increasing mobility of capital, information, digital technology, and people, some researchers emphasize the need to give enough attention to the trans-local, decentralized dimension of music scene development. For example, Keith Harris illustrates how the members of one extreme-metal band, Sepultura, shuttled back and forth across the local and global extreme-metal scene, and how this series of movements shaped their musical career trajectory (Harris, 2000). As for aesthetic value, Grazian's study of the Chicago blues scene examines the way that the authenticity of the Chicago blues was symbolically constructed through global media as an invented tradition. And as tourists were attracted to Chicago to search for this *imagined authenticity*, local participants (musicians, club owners, and other cultural producers) further appropriated the related image to maintain their declining business. An arbitrary version of authenticity was thus sustained by this collusive structure (Grazian, 2004).

The scene perspective can be seen as a response to the condition of globalization in the context of late modernity. The scope of research ranges from the local context of everyday life to the trans-local network, and even to the virtual space featured by the absence of face-to-face interaction; the analytical foci involves interaction, identity,

organization, network, flow of information, social condition, and globalization, and so forth. To integrate this multifarious perspective, Peterson and Bennett further develop a typology composed of “local scene, trans-local scene, and virtual scene,” and argue “there is no hard line between what is and what is not a scene ... between members and nonmembers ... It seems more appropriate to see the degree to which a situation exhibits the characteristics we have discuss” (Peterson and Bennett, 2004: 12). They later use the term “sceneness” to refer to the degree of the characteristics they have discussed, which somehow connotes that they are proposing a Weberian-comparative method by utilizing *ideal-types*. But the problem is, how can we find an appropriate comparative basis when what constitutes a particular ideal-type appears too obscure? This somewhat reflects a problem in this perspective’s theoretical development, that is, since this term was first used and subsequently theorized, there has been no integrated epistemological framework.

Many who use the term “scene” are attempting to articulate a more open framework for defining this concept in order to make it flexible enough to capture different dimensions of cultural activity situated in differently ontological levels, which may include “spaces, organizations and infrastructures; affects, emotions, and structures of feeling; or routes, networks and practices that make a particular scene part of the texture of a place” (Woo et al., 2015: 292). It has never been used under a clear epistemological framework, and, as Hesmondhalgh argues, “has been used for too long in too many different and imprecise ways ... to be sure that it can register the ambivalences that Straw hopes it will” (Hesmondhalgh, 2005: 30). In order to defend such epistemological openness, Woo and colleagues argue that it is more of a “sensitizing concept,” which “does not name a thing, or even a class of things, but an orientation to things,” in contrast to the traditionally definitive concepts which are adopted to “refer precisely to what is common to a class of objects” (Woo et al., 2015: 291–2). With such seemingly overarching openness, however, there are still strong needs to adapt other definitive concepts to make sense of the particular class of objects observed in the scene. For example, in reformulating this concept, Peterson & Bennett’s formulation of this concept “draws heavily on Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) idea of ‘field’ and Howard Becker’s (1982) idea of ‘art worlds’” (Bennett and Peterson, 2004: 3). Without the adaptation of other more restricted concepts or frameworks, it might just be an empty notion without any substantial analytical power, and is hence,

as Peter Webb argues, “fairly descriptive” (Webb, 2010: 29). In Nick Crossley’s recent works on the complicated process of the networked formation of the Manchester rock scene, for instance, the definition of (local) scene is merely a group of people (Crossley, 2008), in which “scene” can also be interchangeable with “(social) movement” (Crossley, 2009).

The scene perspective does provide a significant contribution to an understanding of the formation and transformation of particular cultural practices in the globalized context. However, its over-emphasis on the fluidity and transposition of shared musical practice is not conducive to a detailed account of the mechanisms that shape artistic repertoires. The most common questions under this perspective tend to focus on the forms and conditions of the formation and transformation of a scene, but barely look at the maintenance or reproduction of particular styles, or how it confines participants’ musical conditions of possibility. For example, Cohen has dealt with how punk rock’s anti-virtuosity stance affected the way musicians in Liverpool made their musical works. But how were those styles were maintained? What kind of role did those styles play in the process of music making? Are they sources of creativity or just musical confinements? To what degree were the musicians required to conduct their activities through these styles? On other hand, it barely problematizes musicians’ formative years in institutions that pre-date their clustering together in the cities. Where, how, and under what circumstances, do the active musicians acquire particular sets of skill and knowledge which are more valued and thus necessary in the scene, whilst the less valued skill sets are either deliberately excluded or simply overlooked? Becker argues that, as a type of artistic activity, musical activity involves a series of problems concerning *choices* of equipment, of methods, of places to (dis)play, of works to purchase, of gigs to attend, and most importantly, of particular sets of knowledge and skills to learn. These decisions are often institutionally constrained; however, these questions have been to some degree marginalized in scene perspective. In what follows, I will draw upon cultural sociology with foci on Becker and Bourdieu to address the issue of the shaping of artistic/cultural practices.

Artistic Activities in the Art Worlds

The core question in Becker’s theory is “how are the results of artistic activity

collectively produced?” In his argument, artistic activity is composed of a series of choices made by participants. By treating art as a kind of profession, Becker argues, it is the shared convention that facilitates and maintains the operation of the art world’s collaborative network (Becker, 1982), which is constituted by every related role in the production of a particular artistic work.

Becker further elaborates his theory by providing a four-part typology that distinguishes types of artists into “integrated professions,” “mavericks,”¹² “naive Artists,” and “folk art” (Becker, 1976, 1982). This typology is mainly based on the degree of the incorporation into the shared convention, and the first three types of artists to some extent share the same art world as the main arena for their activities. For example, “integrated professions” are those who most fit the artistic canon by utilizing available material and repertoires. “Mavericks” are those who come from the same art world but seek alternative repertoires to present their result. The more they detach themselves from shared convention, the narrower is the distributional channel that they can share with the existing world.

The role that convention plays can be best illustrated by the mavericks’ relation to the integrated professions. In the case of musical activity, Becker uses the example of Charles Ives, a modernist composer engaged in experimental music during the first half of the twentieth century, to demonstrate the way that the degree of the overlap between his artistic repertoire and the existing musical convention can significantly influence both the consequences of his work and the way he worked in the musical world. Charles Ives developed a series of innovations in musical composition; however, the given network could not effectively realize his work in terms of the available technology of instruments, players’ abilities, audiences’ reception, and venues to play (Becker, 1982: 233–42). Samuel Gilmore further elaborates this approach by addressing the case of the different concert worlds in New York City. As the emphasis on either “innovation” or “virtuosity” can be the criterion for identifying various types of artistic activity, he argues, it is the different degrees of the dependence on convention that differentiates sub-worlds in New York concert scene (Gilmore, 1987,

¹² The concept of “maverick” corresponds to the “avant-garde” in Bourdieu’s field of cultural production (1993).

1988).

In Becker's definition, the term "convention" refers to the required-collective knowledge for the artistic activity which can facilitate the process of artistic production and circulation. However, he barely deals with the necessary conditions in which an actor can acquire the relevant skill and knowledge, as well as the issue concerning the unequal access to valued conventions. In his article, "The Power of Inertia," Becker further elaborates on the concept of "convention" by treating it as a "package" of artistic choices, and argues that "you find it enormously easy to take everything that comes with that choice, and enormously difficult to make any substitutions" (Becker, 1995: 304). This argument does make sense of the process of collaboration as a collective activity involving a *chain of agents*, but at the same time, these *choices* are presented as something that could be easily acquired without any problem. In most situations, the acquisition of convention is far more complicated than in this portrait; it usually involves a series of training, competition, and authoritative recognition. In fact, not everyone can be sanctioned as similarly competent in a particular convention. On the other hand, as I will show below, this also relates to Becker's second drawback: the issue of social identity in the form of aesthetic belief in the art world. These problems, I will argue, might be supplemented by Bourdieu's analysis of the field of cultural production.

The Field of Cultural Production

The key concern in Bourdieu's field theory is the logic of the omnipresent phenomenon of cultural distinction in social lives. To some degree, although it is based on different epistemological ground, it can be argued that Bourdieu shares some similar questions with Becker: how artistic repertoires are collectively produced and constrained. However, he does not treat this *collective* as something that can be fully represented by the sum total of collaborative personnel as Becker does (Bourdieu, 1993: 35), but rather sees it as a series of social relations, which are shaped by the distribution of different forms of capital actualized by social agents' accumulation of economic, cultural, and symbolic resources, in the arena of cultural production. Hence, this arena can be understood as a "field" of social forces that regulates the possibilities of participants' action.

The field, according to Bourdieu, is constituted by different positions, on which social agents are mobilizing different forms of capital to compete for both the dominant position and the power to define what is desirable in cultural activity (Bourdieu, 1993: 72–3). In the field, social agents' specific ways of acting and perceiving is propelled through the intermediary of their *habitus*, which is a set of durable and transposable dispositions shaped by both their position in the field and the trajectory of their upbringing (Bourdieu, 1984, 1993). The concept *habitus* helps to explain why the social agent in the same position tends to adopt the similar repertoire to act and perceive, which is often displayed in an oppositional form against other agents in different positions in the field. For instance, in his analysis of “the faction of the avant-garde” in the French literary field of the nineteenth century, the avant-garde's attitude of “disinterestedness” in cultural activity can be properly illustrated by the structurally ambiguous positions which they take: their attitude of refusing to take references to audiences' expectation can be understand as a repertoire to mark their difference to the “social art” and the “bourgeois art” (Bourdieu, 1993: 166–7). Through this relational framework, Bourdieu reveals not only the objective relation that frames specific artistic repertoires, but also the conflictual and reproductive nature of artistic activities, which are often concealed by agent's aesthetic belief—the *illusio*—made by the social dynamic of power relations in the field.

In popular music studies, this theory has been widely adopted to examine the social mechanisms that shape musical activity, especially in terms of how particular aesthetic values, which are often presented as certain idiosyncrasies attached to artistic works, are produced, maintained and then objectified in the form of style. In his analysis on the problem of musical value, Simon Frith (1996) utilizes Bourdieu's idea of taste distinction to demonstrate how the division between high and low art can be seen as an invention embedded in the history of the rise of the bourgeoisie. He further combines some of Becker's insight on “world” and Bourdieu's “sub-field” to develop three ideal-types of discourses in order to examine the discursive contexts in which value judgments in contemporary music world are made, and the historical context in which these discourses are rooted. By examining the mutual distinction and interplay among the historically shaped discourses (the art discourses based on bourgeois art, the folk discourses organized around the idea of everyday life, and the commercial discourses organized around the music industry), Frith illustrates how the boundary

work in the music world is revealed (Frith, 1996). As for musical genre, Ryan Hibbett uses the concept of “cultural capital” to show how “indie-codes,” as cultural capital, help proponents of indie rock to “generate and sustain myths of social or intellectual superiority” (Hibbett, 2005: 57). Another example is Nick Prior’s analysis of the experimental genre “glitch.” Through an elaborate use of the field theory framework, Prior shows how aesthetic values are shaped and sustained by both the “culturally privileged” position taken by the practitioners of glitch, and how their “aesthetic credentials” are regularly defended with respect to the esoteric, specialized knowledge (Prior, 2008: 308–9).

The Cultural World and the Field Within the Scene

Here, I want to briefly focus on the difference between Bourdieu and Becker on the role of “knowledge and skill” in artistic activity. I have stated that in the scene perspective, a detailed account of the social shaping of artistic repertoire is missing. It is clear that we can find some relevant resources in both Becker’s *convention*, and Bourdieu’s *field* and *cultural capital*. While both writers’ concepts all refer to relevant skill and knowledge in artistic activity, there is a significant difference between them. Convention refers not only to the particular knowledge and techniques in a given art world, but also to the package composed of different specialties required by all the related collaborative roles in the art world. Becker has clearly addresses this point, as “they are all connected in such a way that, when you choose any one of them, you find it enormously easy to take everything that comes with that choice, and enormously difficult to make any substitutions!” (Becker, 1995: 304). Although Bourdieu does not stress this *shared, collaborative* nature in using the concept *cultural capital*, at least there is no way to deny the fact that the acquisition of particular cultural capital can help one to have more opportunity to work with other people in the field. The most significant difference is that, while Becker’s theory does not take account of the unequal access to the acquisition of particular knowledge, Bourdieu’s *cultural capital* treats useful knowledge and skill as something relatively scarce (in terms of its distribution in the field), which requires one to devote a certain degree of material and temporal investment to acquire (Bourdieu, 1986). Therefore, the knowledge here, as in the case of Hibbett’s “indie-code,” or Prior’s example of “esoteric, specialized

knowledge in glitch,” is the very entry barrier for one to enter into the *particular* artistic arena.

Although Becker’s approach is featured in its collective perspective, the motivation that drives an actor seems to be reduced to economic consideration in terms of the social consequences of different choices in artistic activity. For Bourdieu, the artistic field is not only a space of the distribution of capital, but also “a universe of belief” (Bourdieu, 1993: 264), as “cultural production distinguishes itself from the production of the most common objects in that it must produce not only the object in its materiality, but also the value of this object, that is, the recognition of artistic legitimacy” (Bourdieu, 1993: 264). This “artistic legitimacy,” in Bourdieu’s framework, is the symbolic capital which can be acquired by the accumulation of the valued, consecrated type of cultural capital, which becomes the entry barrier that can maintain the status of both the possessor and the accompanying style, genre, or school on the one hand, and creates *illusio*, the source of social identity in the form of the recognized aesthetic value, on the other.

Seemingly, there are certain points upon which Bourdieu’s theory can supplement what is missing in Becker’s framework. However, there is one noteworthy point in Becker’s critique of Bourdieu, in his substitution of “flesh and blood people” by factions of puppets whose actions are merely responses to the “forces” in the field (Becker, 2006: 277). These “flesh and blood people,” in sociological terms, are actually the related collaborative roles in artistic activity. The real problem here, I argue, is not just on Bourdieu’s underestimation of associated personnel, but also a meso-level analysis of organizational patterns. Although it can hardly be argued that Bourdieu does not address this issue at all, at least in his analysis of the nineteenth-century French artistic literature field he demonstrates how state-sanctioned artistic activity was maintained by the annual Grand Prix competition in which the role of jury was played by academic artists (Bourdieu, 1993). However, the point here is that, in his framework, there is no concept relevant to the role of organizational patterns. Instead, as Becker criticizes, the social forces created by the relation between different positions still play the ultimate role *in the last instance*. This might incur a tendency of the omission of a meso-sociological detail of *the process and the way* in which the particular artistic repertoire is institutionally shaped and sustained. So, before deploying Bourdieu’s field theory, Becker’s framework would be useful for

articulating a detailed account of the relationship between the organizational requirement and the content and the contour of culture practice at a more institutionally situated level.

Among the terms “scene,” “world,” and “field,” each conceptualization has its own epistemological position, aspects of focus, and types of questions, which make them somewhat incompatible with each other. No concept is perfect, of course— they all have respective drawbacks as already mentioned. In the following chapters, I will treat each of them as metaphors of different ideal-types of cultural space, which can be used according to the specific aspect of analysis. For example, Bourdieu’s “field” is used to emphasize the hierarchical nature of the social space of musical production in which different social groups are struggling for artistic legitimacy and symbolic power. When looking at how certain styles of playing instruments are institutionally shaped, Becker’s “world” would be the useful tool to illustrate the relationship between particular conventions and the mutual connectedness between social organization, market, the division of labor in music industry, and career requirements. As for “scene,” it is used to refer to the social space of music marked by specific locality, entangled with different aspects of history, which can be deployed in a more flexible way to describe a relatively more general state of cultural formation. The shift between these three concepts does not mean that they are interchangeable to me; I am also aware of the epistemological difference between them. In here, the uses of these terms resonate with Nick Prior’s theoretical stance to

... keep them both in the toolkit when examine musical collectives: not to conflate them, but to let them bring out various nuances of the case, including different scales of analysis; to recognize power and conflict but not to lose sight of the ‘doing’; to describe collective actions but also how these actions accrete over time into positions and broader configurations. (Prior, 2014: 16)

Theoretical Frameworks

This thesis looks at the subcultural meanings, specific ideological functions, and the formation of cultural taste and aesthetic belief in the rock practice of the elite high

school students in Taiwan. As they relate to the issues concerning musical styles and modes of musical operation, in the first part of the thesis I will trace the stylistic sources of students' rock practice: where did relevant genres and modes of musical operation come from? How did they take the dominant position in relation to the others? To what broader social process are they related? As will be addressed in the later chapters,¹³ the origin of the dominant musical style in the field of high school rock was closely intertwined with the operation of the organizational platforms and the configuration of the musical career structure in the popular music scene in the 1990s. In this light, I will first adapt Becker's model of the interactive relation between artistic conventions, resources, and the collaborative network, to conduct an institutional analysis of, firstly, how instrumental virtuosity has been shaped and maintained as the most significant principal of musical operation by the job requirements of several available career options—for example, cover-versions musicians and studio session players—and the reward system of the musical competition.

Although this framework provides useful tools for us to reveal the collective nature of the artistic activities by illuminating the condition of collaborative work, it stops at the organizational level and does not dig deep into the symbolic dimensions of cultural production and relevant power relationship. As will be seen in Chapter 5, for example, the shared musical taste of the majority of student learners in the 1990s was characterized by their collective love of rock, which in their eyes was musically and ideologically distinctive from the mass-produced popular ballad music. However, the musical-aesthetic standard of session musicians, whose work was mainly serving the production of the mass-produced pop songs, was unreflexively accepted in the teaching/learning institutions (that is, lessons in music shops, clubs, textbooks) as the universal standard in learning to play rock instruments. While a Beckerian framework will lead us to look at relevant institutional conditions, however, it cannot explain how particular sets of musical conventions for producing pop ballads could acquire musical legitimacy in the world of rock, while the instrument learners strongly disdained mass-produced pop music, and how they were valued more than the other modes of musical operation. On this point, I will then use the conceptual tools in Bourdieu's field theory to shed light on the particular social dynamics in the patterns of musical taste distinction. By way of this approach, I will illuminate how the professional

¹³ See Chapters 4 and 5.

conventions of certain musical jobs were valorized as useful cultural capital and valued symbolic capital in the field of popular music production.

The second part of this thesis is its core subject: the subcultural distinction in the rock practices of Taiwan's elite high school students. In this part, firstly, the CCCS's theoretical orientation on the relationship between patterns of subcultures, parent culture, and the wider social context, is fairly useful for me to understand the social meaning and function of the particular configuration of high school rock culture in Taiwan. On the one hand, the rebellious gesture displayed in the way elite students engage in rock activities can be seen as a subcultural response to their shared condition of existence: the threats to the long-consecrated status of elite high schools and elite students brought by ongoing educational reform starting in the late 1980s. By the collective pursuit of double excellence at both play and study, the elite students act against authoritative control and traditional expectations, and further struggle for reshaping their self-definition. On the other hand, the isomorphic relation between students' rock activity and exam culture also strongly conforms to the CCCS's focus on the similarity between the subculture and the parent culture.

Despite these parallels, there are also several differences in my case which cannot be fully illuminated by the direct use of the CCCS's model. As already stated, the foci of CCCS's subcultural perspective are too class-centered and they over-essentialize youth subcultures as the cultural resistance of the peripheral groups, which are usually locked at the ritualistic, spiritual level and function to symbolically compensate the disadvantageous conditions facing the subcultures' members. The subjects of this study, however, are students of elite high schools. Although it similarly belongs to the symbolic level, the subcultural resistance of these elite youth in Taiwan also allow them to display their superiority, and mark them out from the students of lower-ranked high schools ("they not only study well, but also play excellently!").

In the CCCS's traditional model, class relation is presumed to be the most fundamental social relation; youth subculture is thus equated with the resistance of the subordinate class to the dominant class. Contemporary social life, however, can never be fully exhausted by one single social relation. Apart from class, each member in society is also defined by different dimensions of social relation, such as gender relation, racial relation, ethnic relation, and any other dimensions which might weigh differently in various social situations and contexts. If we take other social differences

into consideration along with class, or any other single social difference, the social dynamic in the relationship between dominance/oppression/control and subordination/resist/subversion must be very different from as it is depicted by the subcultural theorists. For example, some particular cultural forms marked by strong relevance to a particular type of subversion to the mainstream value might at the same time be hegemonic in other dimensions of social differences. This is evident in Simon Frith's critique of "cock rock" in early rock 'n' roll, which was marked by demonstrations of masculine control (Frith, 1990) and created barriers for women attempting to access this cultural form. Similarly, a particular social group might take the dominant position in one or two certain aspects of social differences, but at the same time be in subordinate position in relation to the specific others in the other aspects. Such a tendency might be particularly common in the colonial or post-colonial situation. For example, in the founding work of critical pedagogy, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire uses the term "sub-oppressors" to refer to some particular colonized individuals who aim to be the oppressors; they "manifest a type of horizontal violence," as Freire quotes Fanon's famous concept, "to strike out at their own comrades" in the colonial situation (Freire, 2005: 62).

Of course, this does not mean that each dimension has equal weight in shaping our social lives. Especially in a highly institutionalized life situation, certain aspects must weigh more than others. In my case, the KCRC's students' life-world is constituted mainly by their educational institution (in which their subcultural activities are situated) and their families; the pattern of their social relationship is mapped along two main lines in the educational system: the one is the vertical relation to the authoritative figures including parents and teachers, the other is the horizontal relation to their peers. In this intersectional situation, students' subcultural repertoires allow them to, on the one hand, struggle for a certain degree of autonomy in authoritative relations (with parents, teachers, and traditional social expectations), and on the other hand, display their superiority and exert horizontal symbolic violence to peers in lower-ranked high schools. On these grounds, by adapting the CCCS's proposition of "subcultural solution" to Bourdieu's field theory, I propose the concept "*subcultural distinction*" to make sense of the double nature encapsulated in their subcultural activities.

Subcultural distinction is a particular state of cultural distinction secured through

specific forms of subcultural resistance, which can further accrue symbolic profit and cultural legitimacy for the agent by exerting symbolic negation to particular sets of dominant values and mundane interests. In fact, many forms of subcultural practice more or less bear the quality of distinction secured through symbolic negation of dominant values or modes of social practice, which are not given enough attention and emphasis in existing academic writings. For example, apart from the obvious quality of resistance, in the social universe of the counter-school culture, Willis's "Hammertown lads" also manifest strong degree of masculine superiority to the obedient, sissy "ear'oles" (who represent the social agent of the mainstream values in the educational field), especially in the sexual realm, by deploying a series of rebellious repertoires which "make themselves more attractive to the opposite sex." Thus "it is a matter of objective fact that 'the lads' do go out with girls much more than do any other groups of the same age and that, as we have seen, a good majority of them are sexually experienced" (Willis, 1981: 18).

On objective grounds, certainly there are differences in the degree of distinction which each type of subcultural practice can secure. For example, in the broader social context, the subcultural repertoires of the lads cannot secure much profit of distinction for them, given their disadvantageous position and the inferior forms of capital they possess in the wider symbolic space. As Bourdieu illustrates in his analysis of the profit of distinction's source, the more valued capital one possesses, the more she or he can manipulate the system of differences to their benefit and thereby secure the profit of distinction (Bourdieu, 1991). This clearly explains how and why the subcultural resistance of middle-class youth and working-class youth might be unequally assessed and treated, as noted by Clark and colleagues:

Even when working-class subcultures are aggressively class-conscious, this dimension tends to be repressed by the control culture, which treats them as 'typical delinquents'. Even when the middle-class counter-cultures are explicitly anti-political, their objective tendency is treated as, potentially, political. (Clark et al., 2006: 48)

So, the key to the difference lies in the position of the agent in the field, which is associated with the available forms and amount of capital that can be mobilized by the

agent in specific symbolic space. That is to say, the more valued capital one possesses, the better position in a particular field they can take, and hence the more symbolic profit and legitimacy can be accrued through their subcultural resistance for the agent to “secure distinction through resistant act.” The core in the proposed framework is to take the wider patterns of social division into account, in order to explore the intricate relationship between the subcultural participants’ broader social position and the specific value and meaning of their subcultural practice, as well as the accompanied social reward or punishment. As can be seen in Chapters 7, 9, and 10, it aims to go beyond Sarah Thornton’s internal analysis of “subcultural capital” by exploring the connectedness between the value and status hierarchy “within” the subcultural world and the wider structural condition that young people are facing in their broader social lives. By following this reasoning, in the second part of this thesis, I will deploy a Bourdieu-driven analysis of *subcultural distinction* to shed light on the following three facets:

- How is the advantageous position, which is offered by the particular institutional arrangements in the exam-oriented educational system, taken by students of elite high schools allow them to enjoy more material and cultural resources to engage in their school club activities? How is this situation advantageous for them for acquiring the relevant skill and knowledge and hence the accumulation of useful cultural capital and dominant symbolic capital?
- In what social dynamic in a particular relational context, and in what way, does the subcultural resistance of the elite youth in Taiwan allow them to acquire particular symbolic profit which students of non-elite high schools can hardly attain? How does rock become a “toolkit” for elite students to secure “subcultural distinction”?
- How does the position of elite students in the field of education allow their musical performance to gain more legitimacy and recognition?

Chapter Summaries

The layout of the thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 2 is concerned with the methodology of this research, including the original research design, methods

deployed in data collection, the relationship between the researcher and the field of study, the developmental process of the research, and ethical issues.

Following is the first part of the substantial content involved with positioning the research historically and sociologically. In Chapter 3, I illustrate the socio-historical genesis of Taiwan's elite high schools, and the rise of the subculture of the collective pursuit of double excellence in both study and play, along with the process of educational reform. I first trace the historical process of high school education's hierarchization, and then go on to examine the institutional details of how elite high schools are produced by the exam and ranking system. I also illustrate the formation and transformation of the socio-cultural meaning of elite high schools. In the final section, I reveal the historical process of the rise of a new pattern of elite students' distinction with the advent of school club culture, which is the very starting point of the high school rock phenomenon in Taiwan.

Chapters 4 and 5 attempt to provide a historical account of the social genesis of the cult of instrumental virtuosity in the popular music scene in Taiwan by looking at the institutional development of popular music industry and rock music. In Chapter 4, I introduce the transplantation and development of rock in Taiwan, connecting it with the changing international political order in the Cold War structure. I also analyze how available career options for rock musicians were shaped with the rise of the local popular music industry, which was facilitated by economic development in the 1980s.

After discussing the career types and institutional spaces for rock musicians, Chapter 5 looks at how particular ways of playing instruments were shaped, maintained and encouraged under these social mechanisms. Here, I utilize Howard Becker's idea of the *convention* to show how the career requirements of certain jobs for musicians shaped a collectively shared professional musicianship, which is threaded by the cult of instrumental virtuosity. On the other hand, Bourdieu's field of cultural production is also adopted to fill Becker's theory gap in questions concerned with artistic legitimacy, to reveal how instrumental virtuosity is valorized as valued cultural capital and symbolic capital for local young rockers to demarcate themselves from "local pop music." In the final part of Chapter 5, I show how rock music permeated the high school campuses and became a thriving subcultural form for students, with rock's growing popularity in the mainstream market and the rise of local indie scene; I also discuss how the cult of instrumental virtuosity was consecrated in

the high school rock world while the overall teaching system is dictated by professional musicianship, regardless of the rise of local indie scene.

Part 2 discusses the major findings of the ethnographic details of the thesis and is concerned with probing the sociological implications of rock music in high schools in Taiwan. Chapters 6 and 7 look at both the structural condition of youth rock culture in Taiwan and the socio-cultural meaning and function of rock in relation to elite schools' distinction. Chapter 6 charts the pattern of youth access to rock by comparing elite high school students to non-elite high school students, and then goes on to show how school success becomes a precondition for local youth to engage in rock. Chapter 7 is concerned with the sociological basis of the broader subcultural milieu shared by elite high school students, and reveals how it is related to the emphasis upon technical proficiency in the way KCRC members learned to play rock instruments. I first utilize CCCS's conceptualization of subcultural resistance to illustrate how KCRC student members' leisure achievement in playing rock instruments offered concrete subcultural tools for them to resist parental expectation. By adapting Bourdieu's field analysis to CCCS's theoretical formulation, I demonstrate how KCRC members' academically superior status created an advantageous condition for them to secure cultural distinction in the broader society through subcultural achievement. Finally, the ethnographic findings also suggest that the institutional arrangement in the students' educational career advance from high school to university is also critical for understanding how their subcultural choices were framed by their schooling pattern.

In Chapter 8, I present ethnographic details of the organizational process of the learning/training process in the KC school's rock club, the main site of the study. It mainly looks at how freshmen are transformed, through a series of disciplinary techniques and institutional arrangements, into the members who are willing to accept the authoritative training style and conform to the organizational requirements of the club. In particular, I demonstrate how certain technical aspects of playing rock instruments are articulated by the authoritative senior/junior hierarchy in the club.

Chapter 9 looks at the broader context of social dynamics in the field of high school rock. It digs deep into the pattern of symbolic exchange in the field of high school rock, and the market of inter-school exchange as the core reward mechanism of students' rock activity. I utilize Bourdieu's field analysis to reveal how elite students' musical superiority is in fact facilitated by their school status shaped by the ranking of

entry requirements, which is covered by the misrecognized and mystifying discourses of superior musical strength, the *illusio* in the field of high school rock. The findings suggest the objective social position of the young people outside the subcultural world also plays a significant role in shaping the social meaning of their subcultural participation, hence intervening in the valorization of relevant subcultural capital and the shaping of the opportunity structure for subcultural status acquisition. Finally, I also show how such patterns of inequality in the engagement of rock activity between schools of different academic ranks is maintained by a structure of conspiracy achieved through the ostensibly “friendly” pattern of gift exchange between different schools.

The thesis’s Conclusion draws in the first place on the implication of students’ rock activity for both their schooling pattern and the operation of the exam-oriented educational system. By making a parallel to Paul Willis’s “cultural penetration” and “limitation” (Willis, 1981), I argue the thriving subcultures operated through student clubs in the high school world facilitate the revision and the reproduction of the exam-oriented educational system. This is followed by reflection on the further implications for those working on youth subcultures, cultural consumption/production and Bourdieusian theory, and the educational reform in Taiwan.

Firstly, a more holistic framework is developed to go beyond Sarah Thornton’s “internal analysis” of subcultural capital (1995). In doing this, I seek to examine the intricate interplay between the properties of young people’s social position in the broader society, patterns of their subcultural participation, and relevant social reward or punishment, both within and outside the subcultural sphere. Secondly, I suggest to pay more attention to the relatively autonomous role of educational process in making sense of the shaping of the patterns of objective differences and the relevant symbolic systems in East Asian societies, given the exceptional importance which is widely attributed to education in this region as compared to western societies. The final implication is concerned with the contribution of this thesis to several issues of educational reforms in Taiwan. Based on the findings in this thesis, I propose a new exploratory route for rethinking the operation of Taiwan’s educational regime by looking at how students “play” to illuminate the widespread impact of the exam-oriented educational system on students’ creativity and identity formation.

Chapter 2

Methodology

This PhD is about learning practice and cultural distinction in an East Asian educational system. The research was originally designed to look at how students learn to play rock instruments, but over the course of the research, it extended its scope to the general learning practice in different spheres of activity in students' schooling life. As will be illustrated below, the change in the foci of the research reflects the quality of the data collected through a school ethnography. In what follows, I will first introduce the original research design and the research methods applied in the fieldwork. In particular, I will address the issues of how my entrance into the field of study was related to the particular internal social relation in KCRC, and how this brought both benefits and limitations to this research. After showing how I overcame the problems that I faced in getting along with the respondents, I will then illustrate some issues arising from the gap between the original research design and the actual ethnography, and then how the research took a different direction will be explained. Finally, I will briefly discuss several ethical issues in this study.

The Original Research Design

Before entering into this field of research, I intended this research to look at particular patterns of musical distinction in the field of the production of rock music in Taiwan, and relevant patterns of learning practice in playing instruments. This research was designed to probe the aesthetic boundary between different positions in the field, by seeing how the boundaries are drawn by the particular usage of musical instruments and different forms of musical knowledge. It aimed to reveal the sociological process of how a musically illiterate outsider is transformed into a position taker within a specific musical taste and aesthetic belief. This design was Bourdieu-inspired and aimed to fill the theoretical gap in studying the “process” of taste formation, by probing the role specific knowledge and the use of technology might be able to play in a Bourdieusian framework of taste formation. The original research questions revolved

around the relationship between taste formation and learning process, thus the learning practices of beginners were proposed as the main target of the research.

The issue of beginners' musical instruction in Taiwan is marked by distinctively local specificity. As already stated, from the 90's onward, learning to play a rock instrument in a high school rock club had become almost the only route for local youth to access the world of rock music. Local rock musicians usually begin their musical journey in high school rock clubs; in this phase, youth can barely find any other route to properly and completely access rock music.¹⁴ In Taiwan, every high school has a rock club or at least has some rock bands in a guitar club. Among all rock clubs, the Rock Club of KC high school (KC, hereafter) is the most renowned. It is marked by a longer history, proper organizational development, and its members' superior playing techniques. It is also the rock club of the best high school in Taiwan. As members of a student group who collectively engage in playing rock music (which appears as the most rebellious and time-consuming kind of leisure activity among all the other types) in the school with the highest entry requirements in Taiwan, they represent the most typical model of dual excellence in both study and play. In this club, every year, less than 5 percent of the graduates only reach entry to local private universities (the secondary option to national universities), while the majority of KCRC graduates gain entry to the five most elite universities in Taiwan. Musically, it is a model club in the field of high school rock. Many students of later rock clubs more or less copied the way members of KCRC manage their musical activity. Through a strict training mechanism, this club was often advertised by its members as the best learning site for budding musicians. According to the members of the club, "even a total beginner will be able to play far better than those who had previously learnt before high school for one year." Last, but not least, up to the present day, this club has "nurtured" many famous musicians in different positions in the field of popular music in Taiwan, making this club a perfect case to explore the problematic relationship between academically elite institutions and the production of local artists. Given these reasons, KC Rock Club became the central focus and site of this study.

¹⁴ See the conclusion of Chapter 6.

Methods of Data Collection

The main social research method employed in this study was ethnography, which was conducted through the techniques of participant observation and unstructured interviews. The use of these methods aimed to capture the details of the students' learning process, how they understood and interpreted their learning practices, and most importantly, how they grasped the social meaning of their specific actions and strategies in a particular organizational context. Ethnography, according to Murchison, is a research strategy to study social and cultural phenomena "in action" (Murchison, 2010: 4). It emphasizes researchers' firsthand involvement with research subjects or informants, to live within the social and cultural context of the research field, to develop a holistic understanding of the culture and the society, and how these relate to the specific meaning of particular patterns of social practice.

This fieldwork was undertaken in two periods, the first was from December 2011 to November 2012, and the second was from June 2013 to September 2013, adding up to 15 months in total. In the first period, I stayed in the club office of KCRC during after school hours nearly every day to "hang out" with students. With the permission of students, a portable video camera and a sound recorder were used to record their daily activity, and field notes were kept when significant incidents or events occurred. The target events for the undertaking of participant observation included the process of instrument lessons and exams, group discussions, daily interaction among members and between senior and junior members, random individual practice, band practice and rehearsals, and gigs. I also participated as an audience member in the gigs organized by other schools, and, when the members of KCRC attended similar events, I would join them as part of their group and observe how they watched, listened, and commented on the performance. In addition, I often participated in the non-musical leisure activities of the members, including meals out, playing basketball, playing computer games, and so forth. This allowed me to gain access to more informal talks, gain trust, insight and a sense of their "culture" outside music and the classroom.

In a similar vein to the problem Ruth Finnegan faced in her study of the different musical worlds in Milton Keynes (Finnegan, 1989: 342), had I only focused on one group, I would then have missed out on the comparisons between them and other types of students and musical groups. On the other hand, the nature of the school

ethnography in KCRC greatly confined my use of time, as I needed to follow the time schedule of their club activity which of course clashed with the time schedule of other schools. Therefore, I had to adopt a mixed strategy to gain appreciation of the experiences of different student groups and other relevant personnel. Apart from the ethnography, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with 71 interviewees. They included 16 students and 11 graduates of KCRC, 8 students of rock clubs from other elite high schools, 7 students and 11 graduates of rock clubs of non elite high schools, 4 school teachers, and 14 key members of musically related positions including instrumental teachers, owners or staffs of music shops, managers in instrument companies, and professional musicians. Several issues were covered in the interviews. With students from KCRC, I mainly focused on their life history, learning trajectory, and the relationship between their musical life and academic life. With the graduates, I mainly asked questions about their learning history and musical career development, and how these related to their early experiences in KCRC, as well as the relationship between their musical achievement and academic study. By interviewing graduates, I aimed to situate the character of the club over time, and to explore the impact of the learning experiences in the high school rock club on their professional musical career. To develop a fuller picture of the operation of high school rock clubs in the schooling context of high school education, as well as the social dynamics in the field of high school rock, interviews with the students and graduates of other elite high schools and those of non-elite high schools were conducted to compare with KCRC. Finally, the interviews with music shop staff and teachers were conducted to illuminate the organizational connection between school clubs and lessons in music shops, to see how these two organizational contexts were combined to constitute the basic sphere of instrument learning, how they shaped students' musical practice and further contributed to a particular schooling pattern.

The School Ethnography in KCRC

Before this ethnography began, I had heard of the strict senior/junior relation many times. In particular, I was told junior members would be required to bow to their senior members. I had never witnessed it until I gained access to the club. In one of the club

exam sessions, I was shocked by a scene in which a group of students of the best high school in Taiwan, made a 90 degree bow to me—which in an East Asian context represents a respectful form of regard for a senior figure, even though they did not have any idea who I was. They bowed, as an instant response to a specific social situation which they have been well trained to deal with.

First Access to the Field: The Power Relation and the Social Distance Between Me and the Students

I was introduced by one of the graduates, Winters Lin¹⁵, to access the group (see also Chapter 8). This access was facilitated by senior/junior relations in two ways. First, in the senior/junior relation, the latter is supposed to obey the will of the former. So, when Winters Lin contacted the 24th leader of KCRC, I.J. Sung, to ask if they would allow me to conduct participant observation with them, I.J. Sung and his club peers agreed. Second, Winters mentioned this research to the students, but also introduced me as the former leader of the rock club of Yengping high school 14 years ago, as well as an active guitar player on the Taiwan indie scene. For the students, I was a senior to them in two ways, as a “grand senior”—an ex-leader of a high school club—in the world of high school rock clubs, and as a senior in the local rock scene. Both might have made students more willing to say yes to my request.

While it cannot be denied the power relation in the senior/junior relation facilitated my access, it was also a burden to the research in the early stages. The obvious power relation between me, as a senior to them, brought substantial social distance, making it harder for me to capture their natural responses in many social situations. They treated me as a senior and they did not call me by name when interacting with me, referring to me only by the title “senior,” as they did with their seniors. Further, given the social distance defined by their senior/junior relation, the junior members were discouraged from actively chatting with the senior members, because chatting meant equal footing, while a proper operation of the senior/junior relation requires a clear hierarchy. Similarly, the senior members would not usually actively initiate a random chat with the junior members to maintain this social order. This put me in an awkward position: before building up close relation with the senior

¹⁵ All names in this thesis have been anonymized.

members, I had better not talk to the junior members without proper reason, to avoid breaking the social distance between seniors and juniors. Hence, during the first two to three months the research was mainly conducted through “observant participation” (Moeran, 2009); most of the time. Field notes, pictures, and video footage of the club lessons, club exams, and gigs were taken. I sometimes avoided making my presence obvious amongst the group to prevent any potential intervention—the intervention caused by my role as an outsider to them—to their group activities.

Under these circumstances, I was unable to attend a few of the very significant club events in which only club members were allowed to stay. For example, before the research had begun, I had heard at the end of the winter training there would be a cruel “semester trial” in which the senior members would conduct a semester review of the junior members and “haze” them by constant scolding, swearing, and ordering them to stand for more than three hours (see Chapter 8). Before the moment came, however, the 24th leader told me politely it might not be appropriate for me to stay, but he would try his best to describe the details of the ritual in later interviews.

Change in the Relation Between the Researcher and the Senior Members

The situation gradually changed in the second semester of the academic year 2011–12. In early March, I was going to play with my band in one famous festival in Kaohsiung, the Megaport Festival. Since performing artists enjoy the right to take a few guests to attend the festival for free, I asked the leader, I.J. Sung, and one of the vice-leaders, Sean, if they wanted to experience the indie music scene. It was a rare opportunity for high school students like them. Normally, festival tickets are too expensive for high school students. In addition, it is a very long journey from Taipei to Kaohsiung, and usually parents of high school students would not allow their children to go on their own. Luckily, my role as a PhD student gave me a certain legitimacy and their parents permitted them to join our journey, which became their first festival experience of their lives.

The event gave them a particular experience, as if they were engaging in the adult music world which many of their club peers had not been able to reach in this phase. Afterwards, the dynamic in the interaction between me and the second year members gradually changed. More and more students came to ask questions about the

situation of the Taiwanese indie scene; on the other hand, I also joined their non-club gatherings more often, including the everyday evening meal out, playing basketball together, going to the Internet cafe to play online games, and most importantly, climbing their school fences with them. As can be seen in the later part of the dissertation (Chapters 6 and 7), the constant occurrence of “bunking off” is a prominent characteristic of KC high school, while “climbing the fence to cut school” has long been a famous part of school life in this school, and is emblematic of a certain extent of student autonomy and rebelliousness which not many schools “allow” their students to enjoy. Gradually, my role in the club transformed from a distant observer to a “cool adult” who might be able to guide them to experience a little bit of the adult world, and therefore the social distance reduced. They started to actively inform me of coming events, and most importantly, I was allowed to be present at the ritualistic events similar to the semester trial and witnessed the way they “hazed” their junior members.

Change in the Relation Between the Researcher and Junior Members

In this phase, although I gradually became part of their club, and could hang out with the senior members, there were still problems for me in accessing the circle of junior members. As already mentioned, under the senior/junior relation, the first year students and the second year students cannot interact on an equal footing. For not breaching their social order, I accommodated myself to their social life. In the beginning I was not used to the almost compulsory greeting at the club. Every time a junior member bowed to me and called me senior, I felt awkward and sometimes even told them “I am not your senior.” One unforgettable example was one day during the beginning of the second semester in the academic year 2011–12, when my friend and I attended an outdoor gig co-organized by them and other elite high schools. When we walked through the sound engineering area, my friend soon informed me there was a student, who I later knew was a junior member assigned by the senior members to stand there to watch over the equipment, made a 90-degree bow to me while I did not even sense his existence. My friend seemed quite shocked by the scene, but I knew that was just how they were educated by their seniors to behave in front of a senior, and apparently to them I was one of their seniors.

To avoid making my respondents feel unduly awkward, I seldom initiated chats with junior members before they become second year students. So, when they were “hazed” by their seniors, and even when they were ordered to stand to attention for hours and not permitted to have a meal during the dinner time, what I would do was sit and observe. Most of the time, I had no idea to what extent they treated me as they treated their senior members, until a moment at the end of the annual gig at the end of the second semester. At the annual concert, a few junior members were allowed to play warm up songs. There was one first year bassist playing really well on stage, and according to my understanding of the club, I knew he would very likely be selected by the senior members as the future leader of the 25th KCRC in the academic year 2012–13. I thought it was a good opportunity to talk to him by complimenting him on his performance, and as a way to build a connection with him. “Hey, Lee, you played very well, that was amazing.” I said to him. He listened without looking at my eyes and kept his head down, only replying with a “thank you” in a very low volume. At first I felt it was a very rude and insincere response, and was wondering if I had done anything that might irritate him. However, I soon realized it was because he treated me as a senior similar to other second year students, as in the club the junior members were required to lower their head and avoid eye contact with the senior members during conversation (see Chapter 8).

There was also one other incident which facilitated the interaction between me and the junior members. In KCRC, there is a tradition that before the junior members become second year students, the guitarists and bassists would be encouraged to buy an expensive instrument to replace their first guitars/bass guitars. The rationale behind this is they need better instruments to match the upgraded musical strength after one year of training. One afternoon, to confirm my observation of the pattern of “instrument change,” I asked one junior guitarist, who was likely to be selected by the senior members to be the future vice-leader of the club, if he wanted to buy a new guitar. He said yes, and I then asked him which brand he preferred. “I used to dream about owning a Gibson, but my private teacher told me to buy a Taiwanese custom made guitar because he said I can get better quality with less being spent.” In the world of private instrument tuition, it is widely known there is strong complicity between instrument sellers and music teachers: usually teachers can get a certain proportion of the retail price of the instrument as the commission for helping the seller to promote

the product. Indeed, I heard some rumors about how this teacher promoted those guitars, and for many years a certain number of students of KCRC purchased their guitars in this way. “If you can access more information about Gibson guitars, would you take more time over your decision?” I asked. He replied, “I want to know more about the guitar.” Later in the evening, I sent him some information about the Gibson guitar that I googled on the Internet, as well as the audio files of different models. I found a second-hand Gibson SG standard guitar on sale in Keelung through the Internet, which seemed affordable for him. He told me he was very interested in the guitar and would like to try it out. The next day, I rode a 50 cc scooter with him sitting on the back seat for one-and-a-half hours to the house of the seller. In the end, he quickly made his decision to buy the guitar. From that day on, he seemed very satisfied with this decision.

Once the annual gig of the 24th KCRC had finished, in the summer of 2012, the second year students retired from the club and became “full-time university exams candidates,” and the first year students were thus upgraded to the seniors-to-be and started to take charge of the club. Although I barely spoke to most of them before this point, the aforementioned contacts made our interactions much easier. Interestingly, more and more students consulted me for information and decision-making over instrument purchases.

My Role in the School Club

The form of participation is a central issue in sociological field observations. It often raises the questions concerning whether it is based more on participation or on observation, to what extent and as what kind of role do we participate, and the accompanying benefits and limitations of a particular pattern of participation (Gold, 1969). As stated earlier, to prevent any unnecessary intervention in their club activity, in the early stage of my fieldwork, I tended to take a more passive role in the club. This strategy, however, soon created some obstacles in my interaction with students and further formed a barrier to my access to the core of their activities. This is somewhat similar to the problem Annette Lareau (2000) faced in her studies of the relationship between parental education and elementary schooling. In the early phase of her school ethnography at *Prescott* elementary school, Lareau also took a passive

role in the classroom as she wanted to act “like a favorite aunt or family friend,” and “was hoping to avoid discipline issues altogether” (Lareau, 2000: 207). She also wanted to avoid unnecessary intervention, however, the dynamics in the patterns of social interaction among students and teachers in the classroom made such a strategy unworkable, and sometimes she even became “the object of a great deal of acting out behavior” (ibid.: 208). That is to say, the students would even tease her when they were not under the teacher’s rule. Later, as she gradually abandoned the passive role and started to be a more authoritative-like figure, when facing the children, the interaction between her, children, and the teachers became smoother and made her participation in the classroom easier. In KCRC, as I started to act like an experienced senior in the Club to whom they could consult with questions of music and academic life, I was then able to be fitted in a proper position amongst their group. In general, there were three kinds of roles that I often played in our interaction that helped me to get along with students and be trusted by them: a friendly senior who spent a lot of time fooling around in their club office, a club teacher with whom they could consult, and a cool adult with whom they could share common interests. When I was in the club office, most of the time I was sitting on the couch and acting as if I was just browsing Facebook (actually I was observing, keeping research notes, and waiting for the occurrence of any significant event) or playing computer games. It looked very much similar to what a retired senior member would usually do in the club office, and members could go about their everyday business that I was not able to witness before.

The Investigational Turn of the Research

The Gap Between the Original Design and the Actual Ethnography

With the progress made in my involvement in the field, I gradually reached the reality of the musical practices at different levels in everyday life, including the daily group lessons and exams, moments of individual practice, the hazing rituals which were relatively unreachable to outsiders, and personal histories of learning through interviews with students and graduates of the club. The more I was involved in their

club activities, the more details of daily practice I learned, but the more difficulties I found in the framework of my original research design.

As already mentioned, I intended my research to examine how students' learning practice is shaped by the acquisition of particular knowledge, and how this facilitates specific musical taste formation and the process of position taking in the field of popular music production in Taiwan. That is to say, by following this framework, I assumed the way students learned was somewhat relevant to the musical boundary between different positions in the field of popular music production. Such an assumption was based on my prior understanding (based on my double roles as both an active indie musician and a researcher) of the patterns of music distinction in the field of popular music production in Taiwan. To some extent, it makes sense to the learning trajectory of many graduates of KCRC who are currently active musicians. Their current musical beliefs and the specific field position they were filling at that moment were very much relevant to the specific knowledge and technical details which they acquired during their high school days. On the other hand, the ways KCRC students learned were also largely shaped by the specific musical pedagogical practice of their private instrumentalist teachers who were musicians of specific taste, and at the same time, the position taker in the field of popular music production. Nevertheless, there were still many unique aspects that cannot be fully explained by the social mechanisms in the field of popular music production.

For example, the existence and operation of the senior/junior relation cannot be understood through the connection between the world of high school rock and the world of professional musicians. In my interviews, many private instrument teachers clearly expressed their disagreement with such a pattern of social relationship. It seemed too "authoritative and anti rock" to them. Similarly, active musicians who were graduates of KCRC also considered it detrimental to students' learning, even though they had experienced and supported it when they were students. Moreover, some famous musicians who were also teaching in the music shops declared they did not want to teach senior high school students anymore because the existence of senior/junior relation was in conflict with the pedagogical practices in the lessons in the music shops: ultimately students would still obey the guidance of their senior members, despite what they learned from professional musicians.

On the other hand, the pattern of student choices in making covers seems seriously lagging behind the ongoing development of popular and rock music and strongly conforms to what Howard Becker calls “inertia” (Becker, 1995) in artistic activities. In particular, while making original songs has been the orthodox aim in both the indie scene and the professional field of popular music production, students are enthusiastic in playing “outmoded” covers which were popular 20 years ago. For examples, some songs by Bon Jovi, Mr. Big, Guns N’ Roses, or even the Eagles were still considered by students as “must learns,” while this phenomenon is often accompanied by a recurring comment from the local indie circles that students never seemed bored by endless covers of “Sweet Child O’ Mine.”

In the first few months of my ethnography, these problems seriously confounded my research expectations and pushed me to rethink my research framework and assumptions. However, with the stronger involvement in the club activities of KCRC, I gradually grasped the academically educational process in fact played a crucial role in shaping students musical practices in the ways which I had never expected.

The Discoveries in the Field: Where the Schooling Matters

This “turn” began from a small question that occurred to me. Around two weeks before the annual gig of the 24th KCRC, I was in the students’ club office watching some members trying to work out an original song. This was very unusual in their musical practice, because most of the time they were just making covers of virtuosic songs. But as I.J. Sung, the leader of the club, told me, after he came back from the Megaport festival, he soon decided he wanted to make at least one original song in the annual concert and give up following the tradition of playing at least one pure instrumental bassist solo song. As the one who was recognized as the best bassist in the club, giving up playing an instrumental song was huge (as can be seen in Chapters 6 and 7) because it had long been what distinguished KCRC from the majority of the rock clubs of other schools and is highly valued. I.J. Sung spent a long time in song-writing, but some other participants in the song did not. In particular, although one of the guitarists, D. Chen, the vice-leader who was recognized as the best guitarist in the club, was part of this agenda, he seemed to spend more time practicing his instrumental covers. Most of the time he was repetitively practicing the same song, focusing on the details of the

technical problems, such as how fast he could play, and how to avoid minor mistakes. In observing the way he conducted his musical practice, I was astonished by his instrumental virtuosity; he could play extremely fast with a high level of proficiency, and was technically far beyond the average standard of high school student musicians or even university student musicians. His playing technique was already almost perfect. Gradually, a question occurred to me. As I wrote in my research notes:

Since he was already technically proficient in representing the musical repertoires in the songs he is going to play in the annual gig, why did he not spend more time strengthening other aspects, such as song writing or experimenting with different guitar tones?

I did not ask him this question right away. Apart from him, most members seemed to follow similar patterns in preparing for the annual gig. That is to say, they all spent the majority of their time and energy in technical details to make their covers of “the most virtuosic songs” as perfect as possible. However, it was not until their annual gig that I started to realize the underlying rationale behind these phenomena, which I was not aware of at all.

The annual gig of the 24th KCRC was on June 17, 2012. Since it was the last event of the second year students,¹⁶ each of them devoted the majority of their time to practicing before the event. On the day itself, I sat in the audience area watching their performance. After a few songs, I decided to go backstage to see if there was something I could help with. When I arrived there, I was slightly shocked by the atmosphere. Compared to their previous gigs, the mood in the backstage area was more serious and solemn; some students chatted softly, while some seemed quite nervous. After the halftime, I could even hear some students sobbing. I then realized it was because this was their last gig in this phase of high school. After tonight, they would all need to fully dedicate themselves to exam revision until they got to universities.

¹⁶ As can be seen in the later chapters, after this event, their role in schooling life would be transformed from student musicians to full-time exam candidates who are supposed to spend the majority of time in exam revision for university entrance.

Later on, there were several minutes during which three student bass players, Chao, Hung, and Dong, were playing *Los Tres Hermanos*, a bass instrumental song played by the bass guitar super group *S.M.V.*, which is formed by three famous bass virtuosos Stanley Clark, Marcus Miller, and Victor Wooten. After this song finished, Chao came back to the backstage area and seemed more relaxed than the moments before he went to the stage to play the bass virtuoso cover. “Now you must feel very relaxed,” I asked him. “Yeah, the hardest part just finished,” he replied.

As every other member of the club would do, a few minutes of instrumental solo in the annual gig totally dictated his daily instrument practice. After this event, they all needed to “retire” from the club and transform themselves into exam candidates, who were supposed to fully dedicate themselves to revising for the university entrance exams, while the first year students could finally become the main “starters” of the club. The opportunity to play a few songs in the annual gig was their last chance to gain recognition and fame. Therefore, for most instrumentalists, a few seconds or minutes of instrumental solo were the very moment for them to demonstrate their musical strength by emphasizing the valued musical repertoires. To a great extent, the way they prepared for these short moments of instrumental solo was very much like the way they prepared for academic exams: just concentrating on repetitively practicing the already prescribed repertoires. Under this circumstance, students’ performing opportunities were concentrated in the second year of study. It was at this moment I started to realize the way they engage in their rock practice, and the patterns in their choice of covers they made, were in fact framed by their schooling pattern, an underlying mechanism which I barely noticed due to my prior emphasis on the operation of the professional field of popular music production.

The Positionality of Myself in the School Ethnography

To some extent, the early emphasis on the musical dimensions can be said to be a limitation brought about by my own musical background. I started to learn to play electric guitar when I joined the rock club at my high school in 1997. It was right at this point that indie musicians and professional musicians in Taiwan’s popular music scene were competing with one another over the issues of originality, creativity and technical ability, and struggling with the definition of legitimate musicianship. At the

time, however, I was just like the students described in this thesis, endeavoring to pursue instrumental virtuosity to make my club renowned in the field of high school rock. I did not care too much about the taste struggle in the popular music scene. When studying in the university, I started to engage in song writing along with a growing interest in more “indie” sorts of music. With such a process of musical conversion, I gradually wanted to break away from my previous musical habits and started to reject the common patterns of musical phrase which I had previously learnt from heavy metal and hard rock.

Later, I became a student of Sociology in my Master’s study. These earlier experiences made me interested in the complex relationship between the instrumentalist learning pattern and the musical career structure in the popular music scene in Taiwan. I especially focused on how the specific career requirements of a few musical jobs related to the almost universalized ideas in learning to play rock instruments. However, such a “musical gaze” made me totally ignore the role schooling played in shaping the ways student musicians learn. As can be seen in the previous section, the ethnographic details of students’ club activity allowed me to see through the “schooling factors” in the shaping of their rock practice, and then triggered a slight change in my research direction. In such a process, I gradually realized I had also once been situated in the same conditions of existence as the students in my research, and had done the same things both musically and academically. I could then engage in what C. Wright Mills called “the sociological imagination” (Mills, 1959) by positioning myself in the intersection between the field of education and the field of high school rock, to make sense of my position in the historical trajectory of the development of these two fields.

For this research, the experiences from the triple roles—a musician, a high school student, and a sociological researcher—that I had played allowed me to revisit the sociological problems in education by looking at how students conduct their musical activities, and vice versa. From the way students engage in their musical activity, I learned what they were playing was not just about music, but also about the status struggle extending from the academic competition in the exam-oriented education system.

The Advantage of School Ethnography

After the change in research direction, I started to focus on the role the schooling process played in shaping students' rock practice, and also discovered an aspect that has received little attention in the existing literature on education: how students' club activities in turn affect the way they conduct their academic study, and further contributed to the revision and reproduction of the long existing exam-oriented educational system. This resonates with what Michale Burawoy called "the complementary notion of the totality as composed of mutually interdependent parts" (Burawoy, 1979: xv) in his study of the labor process. This finding guided me to focus on a totally different framework, i.e., to see how the sphere of academic study and the sphere of club activity, which are used to be considered as mutually-conflictual, "work together" in the schooling context to shape students learning practice.

Such a change was led by the data collected in my fieldwork, and benefitted from my school ethnography. In the later period of my ethnography, the inextricable relationship between the shop floor culture and the counter school culture in Paul Willis' *Learning to Labor* kept occurring to me. As stated in the previous chapter, the shop floor culture was a significant source from which the "lads" derived a series of cultural forms to develop their counter-school culture. It allowed them to deploy a series of subcultural repertoires to resist educational control, and then display their agency against capitalist regime. Through the "chunky" school ethnography (Willis, 2004), Willis revealed how the "lads" were encouraged by particular sets of cultural forms to actively step on the trajectory towards the working class jobs.

The ethnographic approach, as Paul Willis argues, "can allow a degree of the activity, creativity, and human agency within the object of study to come through into the analysis and the reader's experience" (Willis, 1981: 3). By immersing myself in the daily culture of students' club activity, the ethnographic approach allowed me to identify students' activeness in developing their subcultures vis-à-vis the educational regime, as well as the "non-musical elements" in their musical activity. I could thus make reasonable sense of the coexistence of the two cultural forms, which were usually seen in opposition, embodied in everyday learning. This prevented me from being controlled by the presumption of a top-down position, which might naturalize students' passiveness and the irrationality of their learning practice. It also helped me

make sense of the seemingly irrational existence of the authoritative senior/junior relation in their rock activity. For most rock musicians outside the school context, the combination of such an authoritative system (which is widely used in the military context) with rock music can be said to be the most unimaginable phenomenon. Through the “deep hanging out” (Geertz, 1998) with students, I was able to gradually grasp how and why such a seemingly authoritative system could be crucial and meaningful to their rock activities, as it allowed them to display their activeness and passion, though in an ironical way, in engaging in rock activities, and hence effectively display their autonomy vis-à-vis the educational control.

Other Approaches

Apart from the ethnography, I also conducted historical research to trace the development of two spheres of activity. These were: the social genesis of the cult of instrumental virtuosity in the field of popular music production in Taiwan and the rise of the student club culture in elite high schools with the development of educational reform.

For the first line of historical development, several local studies in Taiwan have developed accounts of the transplantation of rock from the West, as well as the rise of a local industry of popular music production. However, there is still a serious lack of studies on the patterns of musical operation and distinction in the historical process. To fill this gap, I collected different kinds of relevant documents to conduct archive research, including music magazines, memoirs of senior musicians in publications and Internet blogs, instrument magazines and instruction books. I also utilized semi-structured interviews to conduct oral history with nine senior musicians. Of these nine senior musicians, three began their musical career in the early 60’s, while the rest began in the late 70’s to late 80’s. The content of the interviews mainly focused on their learning trajectory, musical careers, relevant musical conventions, and how these connected to the wider social and historical context.

Research into the second part of historical development was based on similar methods. I first reviewed relevant studies to trace the historical development of the high school education and the socio-cultural genesis of elite high schools (so the first

half of Chapter 3 can be seen as a literature review of the historical development of Taiwanese high school education and the socio-historical genesis of elite high schools). As the history of the student culture in local high schools is seriously underdeveloped, I first conducted archive research by examining several resources, including the online database of the United Daily News and China Times from 1970 to 2010, as well as articles and reports in educational magazines. On the other hand, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with four teachers from elite high schools who were in charge of students' activity, to integrate their life experience with the historical lines developed through archive research.

Ethical Issues

Soon after I entered into the field of my study, one specific ethical dilemma became apparent to me. In the early stage of my research in KCRC, I often felt difficulty in deciding the kind of role and the proper stance which I should take when facing the internal power relationships in the club. As previously mentioned, such a dilemma often occurred when I was part of the scene in which the senior members were hazing the junior members. To anyone in such a scene, this would be a complicated issue. It involved not just the simplified problem of whether or not I was just a complicit observer. This is their cultural form, and, not just for them, has long been widely used in many other high schools, work places (particularly in hospitals between senior doctor/nurses and junior doctor/nurses), military, and so forth. If I chose to intervene in the early phase, I would be considered an intruder by them. Even the objections made by graduated ex-members on this authoritative relationship would trigger a substantial backlash from current members. Besides, the substantial gap between our social roles also complicated this issue. As an adult, senior musician, my intervention might be perceived as a utilization of power to "correct" their culture. During the research process, I witnessed and heard several conflicts between the school authorities and student clubs over such an issue in different schools (including KC high school). In this kind of conflict, the school authorities intended to stop the senior students from "bullying" the junior students, especially after they received several complaints from the parents of the hazed students. However, the senior students

viewed this as an issue of “student club autonomy.” For them, joining this kind of club is based on personal consent, so anyone who cannot endure this relationship can just quit, and no one is forced to stay.

Under these circumstances, a direct intervention seemed to me a simplified arrangement. I did not want to let them think I was intending to modify their culture. This was why in most situations of this sort I just chose to watch. However, in situations of more private interaction between myself and a few students, I often talked about this issue with them. The topic of our discussion ranged from their personal feelings and opinions to the social meaning, legitimacy, and potential consequences of the senior/junior relationship and the hazing practices. There had been several occasions in which students could engage in thoughtful reflection; once they even organized a meeting to discuss if they could reduce the social distance between the senior members and the junior members (although it did not work out very well after the junior members joined the club).

By and large, there were no major ethical problems, apart from the aforementioned issue. The “fence-climbing,” for example, might appear in the grey zones of ethical behavior. However, as can be seen in Chapters 6 and 7, this is a normalized culture in this school. In fact, it was not unusual for some non-KC students or non-school members to more or less do the same thing and “take a shortcut” to play basketball on their campus or engage in inter-school club activities. In fact, when I was studying in high school, I was often led by my brother (a graduate of this school) to climb the fence to enter their campus. Finally, the issue of confidentiality has to be given significant concern. To protect my respondents from unnecessary harm, all of them have been anonymized in this thesis.

Part II

Context and history

Chapter 3

Elite High Schools and Taiwanese Education

In 2012, public debate concerning the implementation of the extension of compulsory education from nine to twelve years led to worry from students of the top boys' and girls' high schools in Taipei-Chien-Kuo High School and Taipei First Girl's High School. The students were wary of the consequences of cancelling the long-established joint exam for admission into public high schools, phrased behind inflammatory comments such as "Why do we need to attend class with useless scum?,"¹⁷ referring to students matriculating outside of the traditional exam selection process. Their main rationale was based on the notion the aforementioned students were of an educational standard far lower than those matriculating through the standard joint examination. This discriminative discourse soon provoked a series of debates, along with a newly invented term "Chien-Pei Phenomenon" ("Chien-Pei" being the abbreviation of the combination of Chien-Kuo Senior High School and Taipei First Girls High School),¹⁸ and referred particularly to the negative effects produced by the hierarchization of a single-dimensional screening system at too early a learning stage. However, the topics involved in this debate concerned not only the attitude of discrimination performed by students, but also how this particular type of discrimination regarding students' educational attainment has long been maintained both socially and institutionally.

This chapter will first illuminate the historical formation of the social status of elite high schools in Taiwanese society by looking at the following three aspects:

- the political and economic condition of the hierarchization of high school education,
- the institutional shaping of elite high schools, and
- the social status and cultural meaning of elite high schools in Taiwanese society.

These analyses are proposed to make sense of the material, institutional, and cultural condition of the existence of Taiwan's elite high school students to form a basis for the later understanding of elite students' rock subculture in the second part of the thesis. In Chapter 7, we examine how the usual learning strategies in Taiwan's exam culture

¹⁷ Wang (2012, June) An Elitist Phenomenon or An Elitist Illusion? *Humanistic Education Journal*.

¹⁸ Shi (2012, July) Chien-Bei Phenomenon. *Humanistic Education Journal*.

were replicated in the way students learn to play rock instruments. This chapter presents an examination of the institutional basis that facilitates particular learning practices in the local exam cultures. This will be helpful in achieving an understanding of the significant roles of the key institutional arrangements in students' educational careers that shape specific patterns of both academic learning and subcultural engagement.

The second half of the chapter will then illustrate how a series of institutional arrangements introduced during the educational reform led to a series of changes to these conditions. In such a process, among the elite groups, a new form of campus subculture was gradually formed around the collective pursuit of “dual excellence in both study and play (會玩又會唸書).” With the rise of the student club activities, it gradually replaced the old pattern of “excellence in both study and conduct” (品學兼優)—which had long been valued by parents and school authorities in East Asian education—and became a new form of collective pursuit of an ideal campus life. This, as will be shown in the later chapters, was the very socio-cultural matrix of the development and “eliticization” of the high school rock culture.

The Structural Genesis of the Hierarchization of Senior High Education

Economic Development and Educational Tracking (1960–90)

Throughout the history of educational modernization in Taiwan, the 1960s was recognized as a critical era for two reasons. First, the policy of the extension of compulsory education from six years to nine years in 1968 was introduced in response to growing demand for more educational opportunity brought on by an increase in national income and the size of the middle class. This policy opened the gate to junior high education to the public. However, it in turn created an urgent need for the government to deal with the excessive number of junior high graduates, as corresponding placements at the level of senior high and university were limited. At the same time, the demand for skilled manpower increased due to rapid economic development brought on by the transformation of Taiwanese society from intensive agricultural based to labor-intensive industries. The policy of educational tracking

between senior vocational education and senior high education was later introduced by the KMT regime to resolve both issues. On the one hand, the KMT government increased the amount of vocational education institutions by establishing public institutions and encouraging private establishments (K.Lin, 2012: 59). On the other hand, it also restricted the development of academic educational institutions by both setting the target of transforming the ratio of vocational school students to high school students from 2:3 to 7:3, and constraining the establishment of high schools and universities (I.Huang, 2011; Chou, 2007).

Under these circumstances, vocational education became a major option for junior high graduates to be admitted to the higher level, and the capacity for academic oriented education—high school and university—was strictly controlled. Thus, senior high school, as the first stage of academic tracking, represented “much better prospects in terms of future educational years, future career status, and potential income in the future” (I. Huang, 2011: 2) for relatively few elite students. As studies show, aside from relatively higher social reputations, senior high graduates (without a university degree) also enjoyed better opportunities in both income level and social mobility (Chang et al., 1996), while “the self-assessment of the educational status, vocational status, and income of senior vocational graduates was far lower than that of senior high graduates” (C. Huang, 2008: 63).

The Intensive Hierarchization of Senior High Education: the Expansion of Senior High and Higher Education (1990s–present)

After the 1980s, industrial development gradually transformed the Taiwanese economy from a labor-intensive one to one that was technological- and capital-based. The original demand for labor from traditional industries was shifted to the service- and technology-oriented industries. From the late 1980s onward, the government began adjusting the policy of educational tracking by reducing the ratio of senior vocational students to senior high students.

During the 1980s, as the economy grew rapidly, societal demand for more educational opportunities in senior high and university was growing with the rise of national income levels. The number of senior high schools and senior high students gradually grew in the following decade. Moreover, after the lifting of martial law in

the late 1980s, there were increasing appeals concerning educational reform in which “the expansion of senior high and university institutions” was a central target. As it gradually became the consensus between the government and reformists, the expansion of secondary and higher education soon became the main theme for educational policy-making.

In this wave of educational reform, the expansion of secondary and higher education created increasing placements for those who desired academically oriented educational pathways, i.e., high school followed by university. After 2000, as Taiwanese society gradually transformed into an aging society with fewer and fewer children, the admission opportunities into secondary and higher education gradually exceeded the demand. On the surface, people’s growing demand should have been satisfied by the rapid growth in educational opportunities. However, the already existing competition and hierarchization in high school education had not been reduced. Instead, the hours students spent in extracurricular cram school increased, and the hierarchization had become simultaneously more intense and more subtle.

This can be illustrated in two ways. First, the expansion of higher education was carried out through upgrading or transforming already existing junior colleges. However, both the quantity and the quality of teaching resources in these institutions were not upgraded to the corresponding standard. In the field of Taiwanese education, most educational resources were allocated by the government to public universities that had better academic standings. Consequently, even though the places for admission to universities were expanded in a quantitative sense, the qualitative gap between universities was drastically widened. Therefore, the value of the possession of a university degree was inflated, and the hierarchization of a university education was thus reinforced. As Huang argues in his study of the phenomenon of “*educational rush*” in Taiwan, “in employment, the original question of ‘whether one owns a university degree’ is replaced by the question of ‘which university does one go to’” (C. Huang, 2008: 142).

The expansion of senior high education was also carried out through similar manners: to upgrade existing junior high schools to complete high schools and to transform senior vocation schools into comprehensive high schools. This created a similar problem to the aforementioned. That is to say, without a corresponding improvement in the quality of teaching, the increased places in senior high education

were reduced to second-class options for those who did not perform well academically. In his study on the social and educational background of the students attending National Taiwan University (NTU), the best university in Taiwan, the economist Min-Ching Luoh discovered approximately 36 percent of students in this university graduated from the best boys' high school and the best girls' high school in Taipei; in the interval between 1982 and 2000, 70 percent of students in NTU came from the top ten high schools in Taiwan (Luoh, 2002: 128–9). Under these circumstances, while the result of the joint examination was still a crucial basis for students to be admitted to public high school, the expansion in admission opportunities only intensified the already existing hierarchization because it made the placements in elite institutions even more desirable than before. From a practical viewpoint, this hierarchization was maintained through the screening mechanism of the joint exam, which had long played a critical role in shaping the particular educational culture and learning and teaching practices marked by an extremely exam-oriented nature. In what follows, I will illustrate the historical context of the development of the joint exam, as well as the corresponding social consequence of the linear, one-dimensional hierarchization of secondary education.

Screening Mechanism: Joint Examination and the Production of Ranking

The Joint Public Senior High School Entrance Exam (JPSHS)

In the history of Taiwan's modernization, the High School Joint Examination can be traced back to the issue of "Announcement of Admission for Public and Private High School and Vocational School in Taiwan Province" by the Ministry of Education in 1952. In this announcement, it was suggested schools of similar types could coordinate joint examinations to release students' pressure from excessive exams (Liu, 2011:72). When most senior high schools were still adopting independent admission, Chien-Kuo Senior High School (CK) and Taipei First Girls' High School (TFG) co-organized the first senior high joint examination in 1955. In 1957, five major provincial senior high schools in the greater Taipei area, including CK, TFG, HSNU, CG, and ZS, co-organized the "Joint Entrance Examination of the 5 Provincial High School in Taipei

City.” It was not until 1967, as the administrative status of Taipei City was upgraded to a “direct-controlled municipality,” that the original joint entrance exam was transformed into the “Greater Taipei Joint Public Senior High School Entrance Exam” (JPSHS, hereafter).

This exam was held for two days at the end of the academic year, usually in early July, wherein graduates needed to display learning outcomes on examinations of five subjects: Chinese literature, math, English, social studies, and science. Once the results of the examination were issued, each examinee needed to fill in a *preference sheet* indicating their desired placement choices for senior high school. With this system, each public senior high school had a fixed quota for recruiting new students. After all the examinees submitted their preference sheet, the Ministry of Education (MOE, hereafter) would then arrange the distribution of students to the corresponding school according to the results of the joint exam also the preferences of each student. Once the quota of each school was fulfilled, the MOE would then arrange recruitment for the second most popular school from those that were unable to matriculate into the top high school.

Through this process, the assignment of examinees would proceed until the quota of the least popular school was fulfilled. Concurrently, a clear hierarchization among all of the public senior high schools was shaped. From the 1950s to the 2000s, the JPSHS was instrumental in dictating the future prospects of junior high students. With the planned educational tracking implemented by the government, only 30 percent of students could advance to senior high school.

Competition for matriculation into the elite high school by means of a similar entrance examination caused an even greater distortion of this educational phenomenon. For example, while the rate of admission to public high school was the main target for school authorities, ability grouping was one common pedagogical practice towards enhancing the efficiency of teaching. With this arrangement, the distribution of teaching resources was imbalanced and more advantageous to “better ranked classes.” The labeling effect created through the classification of students often negatively affected students. In such a system, those who perform better academically would be grouped into the “upper tier classes,” whereas the others would be grouped into the “lower tier classes.” In daily language, the latter were usually termed derogatorily as “*Pasturing Classes*” (放牛班). In the literal sense, the “Pasturing

Class” means the students in these classes are like pasture-raised cows because they have substantially been given up on by their teachers. It is a metaphor emphasizing their inability to study. In the usual language in the folk context, students would usually be categorized into the binary classification of “*able to study*” and “*unable to study*” by their parents, neighbors, or senior relatives. While the former were usually expected to pursue a higher educational degree, the latter would usually be expected to get a paid job to contribute to the family or to study in a vocational school and then get a job after graduation.

As for learning practice, subjects irrelevant to the joint exam were often illegitimately replaced by exam-related subjects—sometimes the parents of students would actively require the school to carry out these illegitimate practices, and students were not encouraged to spend their time in extra-curricular activities. Under these circumstances, there was no other way for students to experience a sense of achievement other than studying. All the students around this island, regardless of whether they were regionally, ethnically, or economically different, and no matter their individual interest, were placed under the same measurement, with only the binary label to significantly dictate their life. Moreover, students’ after-school hours were often spent attending extra courses in cram-schools, which had long been seen as necessary in enhancing the possibility of earning a placement in a higher ranked high school.

The Multi-route Promotion Program and Basic Competency Test (BCT)

To rectify the exam-derived phenomena of distorted education, in 2001, the MOE established the Multi-route Promotion Program for Senior High and Vocational Education, and replaced the JPSHS with the Basic Competency Test (BCT) in the academic year 2001. In comparison to the old system, the new admission system was supposed to have two major differences. First, apart from the general assignment of students to different high schools based on the result of the BCT, students were also able to apply for a particular high school on the basis of the assessment of his/her overall performance (including the result of BCT). Second, the result of BCT was universal for all secondary educational programs. Students who aimed for promotion to non-academic oriented programs did not need to take the extra exams.

The Multi-route Promotion Program was designed to reduce the intense competition. Ironically, after the introduction of such a schema, the already existing competition was even more intensified. According to C. Huang (2008), the MOE once planned to take students' school performance into account for admission to high school. However, it soon provoked strong public opposition which raised doubts as to the fairness (each school may have different marking standards, for example) of this arrangement. Moreover, parents were also wary of the increase in students' pressure once every single school assignment and test counts towards admission to the high school. Eventually, MOE had to give up the original plan. The BCT was thus transformed from its original designation as one supporting measure for Multi-route Promotion Program into nearly the only basis for admission to high school, as a "*super joint exam*" in which there were more than 300,000 candidates every year (C. Huang, 2008: 160; italics and bracketed content added). In the application process of most senior high schools, the result of the BCT stood for at least 50 percent of the overall score (Chou, 2007: 74), whereas in traditionally higher-ranked schools it would account for more.

Moreover, the policy of "One Guide-Multiple Text" was introduced to secondary education to diversify the teaching content. Under this policy, the editing and publishing of textbooks were opened to the market, and school teachers were endowed with more leeway to choose suitable versions to instruct their students. As the BCT was still the major factor for students' admission, however, this policy paradoxically created much more uncertainty for students in preparing for the BCT. Subsequently, their parents tended to prepare multiple versions of textbooks in conjunction with sending their children to after-school cram schools, which provided ready-made, standardized content prepared from different textbooks in preparation for the BCTs. Under these circumstances, the culture of cram schooling was even more intensified. According to Chou's study, the number of cram schools in Taiwan had soared, from around 4,500 in 1999 to nearly 17,000 in 2008. Cram schools which saw the greatest increase were "science and literature" (five times higher), and "foreign language" (four times higher), both of which were exam-related (Chou, 2008: 82). What is even more, as students' extra-curriculum talent might be helpful in earning a placement in a better-ranked high school through application, a trend of cram school

attendance for learning extra-curricular talents (such as painting or playing classical musical instruments) also arose.

While the hierarchization of high school has been objectified through the form of joint exams, the public perception of “educational achievement” has therefore been framed and locked in this mechanism, which creates increasing demand for admission to elite high schools. It therefore ironically resulted in a contradictory phenomenon: while a series of new policies were introduced by the state to reduce the degree of hierarchization among high schools, parents were actually defending such a hierarchization by supporting the existence of elite high schools and the joint exam. Why would Taiwanese parents be willing to let their children fall into the endless loop of taking exams, cram-schooling, and studying just to be admitted to the elite high school? What does an elite high school mean to Taiwanese society? In what follows, I will turn our focus to the social value and cultural meaning of elite high schools in Taiwanese society.

Elite High Schools in Taiwanese Society

In Taiwan, the modern educational institutions can be traced back to the Japanese colonial era (Chang, 1996; Chou, 2007). According to Chang Yinghwa’s study of the history of modern urban development in Taiwan, the establishment of secondary and higher educational institutions was deeply related to the process of urban growth (Chang, 1996). Near the end of the Japanese colonial era, there were four boys’ and four girls’ provincial high schools in Taipei, two boys’ and two girls’ provincial high schools, respectively, in Taichung, Tainan, and Kaohsiung, and one boys’ and one girls’ provincial high school in the remaining cities around the island. Among these high schools, most have existed until the present day and enjoyed the status of being top elite high schools in each city and county.

During the post-war era, 14 municipal and county high schools were established by the KMT-led government to expand high school education. At that time, as the admission of each school was conducted through independent recruitment, there was yet to be a definite ranking among these schools. With the first introduction of the senior high joint exam co-organized by five Provincial High Schools in Taipei in 1952

and the university entrance joint exam in 1955, the contemporary “top three” in the preference ranking of both boys’ and girls’ senior high schools gradually took shape. These included Chien-Kuo, HSNU, and then Cheng-Gong in the boys’ group, and Taipei First Girls and Taipei Second Girls (was later been renamed as Zhong Shan Girls High School) in the female group. After Ching-Mei Girls High School (CM) was established and joined the joint admission system in 1962, the Taipei “top three” in both genders were thus officially shaped.

In the Japanese Colonial Era, the provincial high schools were mostly established in the city center where the schools usually enjoyed better resources from the government and more convenient transportation. With these advantages, plus the long accumulated reputation since the Japanese Colonial Era, these schools became priorities for students in the joint admission program. The clearly superior performance of graduates from traditional provincial high schools in university entrance exams further reinforced the unchallengeable status of their schools in each region. For the Joint University Entrance Exam, normally the performance of provincial high schools was better than the county and municipal high schools, and that of the latter were better than the private high schools.

Studying in one of these high schools represented a guarantee of studying at university, and thus the admission to these high schools could mean the early acquisition of a distinctive status to Taiwanese people. More importantly, admission to one of these schools also functioned to fulfill the students’ family expectations. In his study of Taiwan’s economic history, Sung argues that family honor had long been the most significant driving force in the history of the economic development of Taiwanese society. From the Ching Dynasty to the Japanese Colonial Era, one’s attainment in the examination was crucial in maintaining the status and reputation of one’s family (Sung, 1993; Wu, 2000). When it came to contemporary Taiwan, as C. Huang argues, “this educational-related family honor was mainly attained through one’s achievement in admission to the educational institution of the next level, and the opportunity for access to secondary and higher education was the main stake” (C. Huang, 2008: 186).

Unlike its western counterparts, the elite high school education in Taiwan had long been perceived as a more equitable system. On the one hand, most of the elite educational institutions at the level of high school education were publicly founded

and relied on government funding, which made their tuition fees relatively more affordable for most households. On the other hand, the student selection mechanism of these schools was mainly based on the result of the joint exams, instead of any other methods which might somewhat be biased due to one's economic background (such as an interview). Therefore, while its elite-oriented nature represented a guarantee to a better university and hence a more successful career in the future, it sold a dream of social mobility to the top for those from an inferior economic background. Especially in rural areas, to earn a placement in an elite high school and thereby in a good university through effort had long been perceived as the very opportunity for social mobility (Gallin and Gallin, 1982). The story of the former Taiwanese president, Shui-Bian Chen, was by far the best example of this line of story: he struggled to break free from his impoverished tenant farming background to study in the best high school and the best university, and thereby achieve a successful career in law and politics. It was through this ideological narrative of "earning one's future purely through one's effort," that both the public demand for elite high schools and the legitimacy of the actual unequal distribution of educational resources were therefore maintained. Under this circumstance, even though only less than 5 percent of the population could be admitted to the elite high schools, most parents were still willing to support this system while paying higher tuition fees if their children could only study in the private schools.

The Rise of Student Club Culture and the Collective Pursuit of "Dual Excellence in both Play and Study"

The previous section indicates how the social status and cultural meaning of elite high schools had been articulated in Taiwanese society. To Taiwanese people, they represent not only a highly competitive route for the acquisition of both distinctive social status and a more successful future, but also a seemingly equitable avenue for social mobility which is in its essence unequal to disadvantaged households.

To the students themselves, however, elite high schools mean much more. In the everyday life of elite high school students, scholarship is not the only factor dictating their cultural atmosphere. Especially before students advance to the third year—which is usually supposed to be the revision year for the university exam—the non-academic

side of schooling life matters much more to them. To students, after three years of hard studying during the junior high stage, what really attracts them are the thriving student club cultures in elite high schools. According to the Taiwan Education Panel Survey, more than 90 percent of high school students in Taiwan are involved in school club activities. Local studies on high school culture have also demonstrated club achievements greatly dictate students' sense of achievement (Ho, 2004; Lin, 2011). Particularly in elite high schools, students even value their club achievements much more than academic performance (Tsui, 2012).

The rise of student club cultures in high schools was closely related to two social transformations. One was the expansion of secondary and higher education in Taiwan, which was a consequence of a series of education reform movements and policy changes from the 1980s onward. The other was the rise of youth subcultures in Taiwanese society after the lifting of martial law.

As already mentioned, the hierarchization of high school education had a series of negative impacts on education, learning practice and was seriously criticized in the educational reform movement. First, it contributed to the growth of cram schooling and ability grouping, and further encouraged junior high schools to divert class hours of non-exam subjects—such as art, music, or physical education—into exam subjects (Chou, 2007; J. Wang and W. Lin, 1994; 1996). Second, it worsened “long-distance schooling”: parents made arrangements for their children to make long-distance commutes to study at schools with better academic standing (Tseng, 1990; *Ming Sheng Daily*, January 17, 1983).

From the late 1980s onward, the Ministry of Education initiated a series of policy changes to reduce the academic gap between the elite high schools and non elite high schools. These included: “reducing the difficulty level of JPSHS,”¹⁹ and “enhancing the number of universities, university departments and public high schools” (Y. Lin, 2008). In particular, as the graduates of a few prestigious private high schools and several newly established public high schools also demonstrated outstanding performance in university entrance exams, the symbolic status of the traditional elite high schools was to some degree challenged (Hong, 1989). Under these circumstances,

¹⁹ *Ming Sheng Daily* (1991, March 20) Lowering JPSHS Difficulties to Raise Substantial Results: The Ministry of Education Has a Way against Elite High Schools. *Ming Sheng Daily*, p. 13; *Ming Sheng Daily* (1991, June 29) Major Changes Will Be Made in JPSHS in Five years. *Ming Sheng Daily*, p. 15.

public elite high schools were no longer the “only” guarantee for entry into elite universities: some private high schools and several newly established public high schools with excellent teaching quality gradually became proper options for prospective students.

Moreover, with the introduction of a Multi-route Promotion Program, many non-academic aspects—including club activity, group leadership, and talent competition, and so forth—were adopted as part of the evaluation in university application (although, as already mentioned, exam results were still the most determinant aspect). With the aforementioned institutional change, the non-academic characteristics of traditional elite high schools gradually became a significant form of cultural distinction for the school authority to attract prospective talents (Chen, 1992; Niou, 2001), and for the students to stand out in terms of subcultural distinction from those of non-elite high schools (Li, 2002).

The Rise of Youth Subcultures

On the other side of the story, after the lifting of martial law, several forms of youth subculture, which had been seriously suppressed by the KMT party-state regime and restrained by the conservative social atmosphere, started to develop with the ongoing establishment of urban cultural spaces along with the advent of a consumer society (Wu, 2010; Ho, 2004) (also see Chapter 4). It was in this transitional context that collective youth engagement in the cultures of rock band, street dance, and “cosplay” unfolded with the ongoing tension with parental and school control. As local studies show, these subcultural forms were once negatively labeled as “problematic” and “belonging to the failed students” as they failed to conform to the mainstream value under the grip of the credentialism of the party-state regime (Chen Kuanhsin, 2003; Jhuang Yulin, 2003; Xia Linching, 2003). During the post martial law era, more and more youth groups acquired the right to engage in these “once-problematic” forms of subculture in the newly established cultural spaces—particularly in Ximending (西門町). Moreover, with the rise of party politics in the process of democratization, different forms of youth subculture also became the target for the politicians to “make alliances”—which can be seen in parallel to Tony Blair’s “Cool Britannia” cultural campaign. Such a political strategy not only allowed the politicians to demonstrate the

progressive and “cool” dimensions of the political parties to carve out a particular niche in the election market, but also to tame those problematic forms of subculture into positive and legitimate youth leisure to ensure “social stability.” Apart from the establishment of the Yamaha Band Battle (see Chapter 4), the most remarkable example would be the governmental street dance festival organized by Chen Shuibian, mayor of Taipei 1994–98 and Taiwan’s president 2000–08. In such a process, these forms of youth subculture were gradually endowed with “positive” values and “destigmatized.”

However, the relevant studies mainly focused on the peripheral dimension of the subcultures at this phase, the other lines of the legitimization of youth subcultures were seriously overlooked. With the process of educational democratization after the lifting of martial law, these problematic subcultures also entered the school campuses of academically oriented high schools and were thus legitimized and institutionalized through the organizational platform of student clubs (Chiu, 1995). On the other hand, after the lifting of the dance prohibition in school campuses (which was in the package of martial law), school dance soon became the most popular school event in the major famous high schools. For students, school dance was not only an occasion for each student to dance and have fun, but also an event providing substantial performance opportunities for performance-related clubs such as the guitar club, rock club and the street dance club. As long as one could represent the club to perform in such kind of an event, he/she could easily become the center of attention in the school. Apart from school dances during school festivals or graduation parties, such types of student clubs would usually be asked to provide talented student members to perform in the event; also, these clubs would also organize their own events which would usually be able to attract hundreds, even thousands, of students to attend (see Chapter 9). In this atmosphere, membership of these kinds of clubs represented more opportunities to become an eye-catching figure in the school, which not only made these clubs the most popular club choices, but also functioned to encourage junior high students to expect an ideal high school life.

The Rise of a New Form of School Subculture: The Collective Pursuit of Dual Excellence in Both Study and Play

In such a historical process, particular forms of youth culture unfolded among the groups of “straight A students” *within* the educational system. During the ’90s, many non-academic characteristics and events of academically oriented high schools were presented through the mass media as particular highlights of these schools. This included the water balloon fight of Taipei Municipal Nei-Hu Senior High School,²⁰ the creative graduation ceremony of the Affiliated High School of National Taiwan Normal University (P. Ma et al., 2007), numerous kinds of student clubs of Taipei Municipal Chien Kuo High School (Li, 1992), and so forth. Particularly after the introduction of the Multi-route Promotion Program for Senior High and Vocational Education, school characteristics started to become a significant dimension for the high schools to compete for student recruitment. However, as the academic courses in different high schools were based on common subjects and very much similar to one another, the aforementioned non-academic characteristics were thus appropriated by elite high schools to present the constructed campus culture to compete for recruiting talented students. This even triggered an “arms race” between elite high schools in organizing school events. That is to say, students of different elite high schools would compare the quality and the scale of the school events with one another, which would further put financial pressure on the school authorities (“why can their school organize their graduation party in a larger, fancier venue than ours?”) (P. Ma et al., 2007: 173).

As the campus life in elite high schools turned increasingly open and diverse, with the growing numbers of student clubs, school dance, school festivals, and performance events, many relevant spheres of student activity—rock music, street dance, and popular music in particular—gradually became the main sites for students to compete with one another for public attention (ibid.). In this process, on the one hand, the problematic forms of youth subculture were successfully incorporated in and legitimized by the educational system through student clubs and school events; on the other hand, the traditional categorization for elite youth gradually lost its illuminative power. As the rise of the collective pursuit in the sphere of play gradually dominated the campus culture in elite high schools, those straight-A students were no longer as obedient as usually perceived; they no longer focused merely on academic study and

²⁰ Taipei Municipal Nei-Hu Senior High School, The Introduction of the Water Balloon Fight in Graduation Ceremony, Retrieved from <http://web.nhsh.tp.edu.tw/releaseRedirect.do?unitID=183&pageID=3071>.

exam results, but started to dedicate themselves more and more to the spheres of student activities which had once been seen as problematic by their parent's generation. With such a subcultural transformation, the traditional ideal image of "excellence in both study and conduct" (品學兼優) (which has long been praised by authoritative figures such as parent and school authorities in East Asian education) gradually lost its attraction among students and might even be linked with negative labels such as "hard studying geeks (書獃子)." Instead, students started to pursue a cooler imaged marked by "dual excellence in both study and play (會玩又會唸書)."²¹ In this newly developed sphere of campus culture, the core problematic issue for students was no longer merely exam success, but extended to how to achieve both academic superiority and subcultural distinction.

Marking the Difference: The Subcultural Practices of Elite High School Students

In Taiwanese society, elite high school students have long been one distinctive status group. The collective pursuit of dual excellence in both study and play can be said to be the very cultural badge which not only marks their distinctive status, but also functions to reinforce their self-identity as elite students. In practical dimension, this collectively shared subculture is usually embodied in three aspects, which are an "autonomous learning atmosphere," "close connection with other elite high schools of the opposite gender," and "thriving student club activities."

The Autonomous Learning Atmosphere

In most elite high schools, students usually enjoy much more leeway in their school life than students of other schools. As these schools have long maintained outstanding records in the rate of admission to top universities, the school authorities usually take

²¹ Especially after 2000, such a phenomenon has been a recurring theme in news reports. See, for example, Lin, Lisyue (2003, December 11) Elite High Schools Competition: Dual Excellence in both Study and Play. *Ming Sheng Daily*, pp. a3; Wu, Manning (2013, April 18) TFG Quadruple Winner with 4 NTU Admissions: Dual Excellence in both Study and Play; Chen, Syuanyu (2013, February 21) Tips of Full Score: Time Management. They Play and Study Well.

a generous attitude towards students' daily discipline, especially in terms of students' appearance and course attendance. That is to say, while students of the elite high schools can generally enjoy more freedom in dyeing their hair, wearing non-uniform shirts (though usually the uniform pants are required garb), or getting their ear pierced, students of other schools may even be required to wear shoes with restricted colors (usually white); where students of elite high schools can easily bunk off from school classes without inducing serious sanctions, even when they are seen by teachers on the street, the same behavior may induce a demerit in other schools; where students of elite high schools would still devote themselves to student club activities before the term exams, students of other schools may just pause for revision.²²

In some elite high schools, students would even treat "bunking off" as a given right, while sometimes the school would even receive complaints from nearby shops about their students' skipping class. Of course, there are some gender differences in the degree of leeway students can enjoy between the boys' elite high schools and the girls' elite high schools. In general, students in girls' high schools tend to face more interference from the school authority for the sake of the school reputation, and the situation of truancy in girls' high schools is much less serious than that in boys' high schools.

Connections with Other Elite High Schools of Opposite Gender

Most elite public high schools in Taiwan were provincial high schools established in the Japanese Colonial Era with the feature of single gender education. Up to the present day, such a feature still remains. While there was barely no single gendered high school established during the post war time, such a feature represented one significant tradition which displayed the distinctive status of elite high schools and their students. To elite high school students, this also created significant implications for the social interaction between students of opposite genders in their daily culture. At the collective level, there has long been a common culture between boys' and girls' elite high schools of building close connections across similar student organizations. Many similar student clubs at schools of both genders have long developed exclusive relationship through which students of both clubs would co-organize student events.

²² More detailed empirical descriptions are presented in Chapters 6 and 7.



Figure 3.1 Students of Taipei First Girls' High School coming to KC High School's Student Club Fair to support member recruitment

The famous examples of this are the guitar clubs and rock clubs of Chien-Kuo High School and Ching-Mei Girls' High School, the rock clubs of Cheng-Gong High School and Zhong-Shan Girls' High School. On most university campuses, where there are graduate associations of each high school from around the island, similar associations of elite high school graduates are usually operated in the form of the union between both genders. The most common types are "Chien-Bei Association" (Chien-Kuo and TFG Girls' High School), "Fu-Zhongshang" (HSNU and Zhong-Shan Girls' High), and "Chong-Ching" (Chong-Gong and Ching Mei Girls' High) in every elite university. For students, this sort of connection represents not only strong friendships between these schools, but also an exclusive game of gender/status politics that only

elite high school students can play, implying an ideology of the “proper match-up between the equal status.”



Figure 3.2 A poster for a joint event co-organized by the same kind of student club in both KC High School and Taipei First Girls' High school. The ratio between the number of male and female club members (1:3) participating in this joint event was highlighted in the poster to recruit freshmen.

At the individual level, in the sphere of intimacy, dating a student from the elite school of opposite gender is one common fantasy for most high school students. This can be further reflected in one long-existing culture termed “*Stand Guard*” (站崗): when it approaches the after-school time during any of the weekdays, it is one common scene where there would definitely be some male students standing near the gate of elite girls' high schools to wait for their girl/female friends (Wu, 2010). Most “guards” were students in elite high school uniforms, while those of non-elite high schools would easily be treated as “the neglected others.” As one student of Taipei First Girls' High School recalls:

In fact, there would still occasionally be some students with uniforms of non-elite high schools standing guard behind the entrance gate of our school. But usually they did not attract our attention, because we couldn't recognize which schools they belonged by the uniforms.

Thriving Student Club Activities

To encourage high school students to engage in more extra-curriculum activities to release their study pressure, school club activities were officially instituted as a compulsory course with at least one course hour per week. In private high schools, this may only be conducted to correspond to the minimum requirement: to hire a teacher from outside the campus for that particular course hour, while students are not encouraged by the school authority to engage in club activities for the sake of their academic performance. In public high schools, student club activities have much more weight in students' daily life, especially in the elite high schools (Chen, 1999).

In elite high schools, school authorities tend to take a tolerant attitude towards truancy, entrusting students to be responsible for their own exam preparation. Therefore, their club activities would usually not be interfered with. Many types of student club activities in elite high schools enjoy greater autonomy than those in lower-ranked schools. Their student members tend to invest most of their time—some students even bunk off for club activities—in their club activities with a fully dedicated attitude. Moreover, while public elite high schools have a longer established history than the others, they also have more types of student club with more developed organizational operations, and better resources. This often accompanies a commonly shared faith among the elite high school students that the overall standard of the performance of the club activities in elite high schools is far beyond the average high school standard. While this somehow constitutes part of their self-identity, they tend to be collectively motivated to dedicate themselves to the club activities to honor their clubs and schools. With this collective tendency, the club activity itself became a cultural resource to be utilized to mark the distinctive status students obtained through high school entrance exams.



Figure 3.3 The Student Club Fair at KC High School

Student clubs of elite high school have long occupied consecrated positions in the field of extra-curriculum activities. Especially in both the world of “guitar clubs” and “rock clubs,” the ones in elite high schools have been commonly recognized as top-level clubs, while their members would in turn try very hard to maintain the long-acquired reputation. In the field of popular music production in Taiwan, more than half of the top rock bands were composed of ex-members of relevant clubs who studied in the elite high schools. For example, most members of the two most popular bands Mayday and Sodagreen are former members of the guitar club at HSNU; famous indie bands such as 1976, Cosmos People, and White Eyes were formed by ex-members of rock clubs at both Chien-Kuo High School and Ching-Mei Girls’ High School.

Concluding Remarks

In the process of educational reform, a series of institutional arrangements were introduced to reduce the academic gap between different public high schools. With the introduction of the Multi-route Promotion Program, the non-academic features of campus life were more heavily promoted by elite high schools in student recruitment, as academic standing alone somewhat lost its absolute efficacy for these schools to stand out from one another. In such a process, the social universe of leisure activities gradually became an “arena” extended from the academic exam for students to engage in a new kind of status struggle. In particular, as the graduates of a few newly established public high schools also demonstrated outstanding performance in university entrance exams, the non-academic features became the way for elite high school students to show they could excel at both study and play in distinction to other students.

The second part of this thesis will demonstrate how these features allow elite students to secure subcultural distinction in the educational field. Such an analytical framework, as will be seen in Chapter 7, will allow one to make sense of the problematic relationship association between the particular pattern of rock culture, the academically elite groups, and the exam-oriented educational system in Taiwan. But before proceeding to the second part, there is a need to examine the historical origin of high school rock culture in Taiwan. In the next two chapters, this thesis will illustrate the process of the following three threads of historical development:

- the development of rock music in Taiwan,
- the social genesis of the dominant mode of musical operation, and
- how rock permeated high school campuses and became a popular form of student subculture.

Chapter 4

The Formation of the Rock Field in Taiwan

Infrastructure, Careers, and Public Reception of Rock in Taiwan (1949–95)

Chapter 4 and 5 deal with the historical development of rock (sub)culture and musical styles in Taiwan. This is divided into two parts: the first part looks at the historical process of the establishment of rock culture in Taiwan; the second part analyzes the social formation of the aesthetic hierarchy in the 1990s rock world, as well as its implication for the emerging high school rock subcultural field.

This chapter focuses on the first part. The developmental process of rock music in Taiwan was deeply intertwined with the post-war experience of Taiwanese society's political and economic development, which was embedded in, and fluctuated with, the dynamic of the Cold War structure since 1949. As this chapter will show below, this idiosyncratic history significantly shaped the particular way rock has been brought to and received in Taiwan, later contributing to a localized contour/mode of rock activity embodied through specific career forms and performing events.

Rock and the Cold War

The historical development of the rock music in Taiwan was deeply intertwined with the formation of the Cold War structure in the early post-war period. The Kuomintang government (KMT, hereafter) retreated from mainland China to Taiwan after their defeat in the civil war by the China Communist Party (CCP, hereafter); gradually, the KMT lost its legitimate status as the representative of the “orthodox China” in the field of international politics. However, thanks to Taiwan's strategic location at the front of the defensive line in the Cold War structure, the outbreak of the Korean War in the early 1950s again created an opportunity for the KMT government to retrieve its lost legitimacy alongside the capitalist movement led by the Western European and US governments. In 1954, the Kuomintang government and the Eisenhower government signed the Sino-American Mutual Defense Pact. This not only brought Taiwan under the United States' Pacific and strategic protection umbrella (Ho, 2003: 61), but also brought American popular music to Taiwan to entertain the American soldiers who

were garrisoned on this island. With the establishment of the Armed Forces Network Radio Taiwan, rock music was first imported into Taiwan and was later popularized under the umbrella term “Western Hit Music” (Yang, 2005: 9; Tsai, 2000) through “a series of evening programs on mainstream radio stations airing rock hits from foreign music charts” (Chouinard, 2013: 27).

After the outbreak of the Vietnam War, there was a sharp increase in the number of US soldiers stationed in Taiwan, triggering a growing demand for Americanized recreational venues—clubs and restaurants that provided live music. Apart from the growing number of radio hits programs, the wide distribution of cheap pirate copies and compilations of popular Anglo-American music also provided easier access for urban youngsters and thereby contributed to the growing popularity of rock music (Ho et al., 2005; Chu, 2014). With this trend, an Anglophone-oriented music scene gradually developed, in which increasing numbers of urban youngsters were attracted to a small group of clubs and restaurants to listen to the Western hits performed by bands with members of both local and foreign origins. In these venues, there were no clearly developed ideas about musical genre. The most common musical repertoire was to reproduce a Westernized musical space by performing covers of Western chart songs, which was the convention for local musicians to follow to earn reasonable pay.

From the late 1960s onward, the confrontation between Communist China and the Soviet Union had become increasingly intense, creating an advantageous condition for the US government to form an alliance with the Beijing government against the Soviet Union. In 1971, the People’s Republic of China was officially accepted by the United Nations as an official member state; in the same year, Taiwan withdrew its membership in the UN, and gradually lost its perceived legitimacy with regards to its international relations. With the transformation of the US government’s guiding principle of its diplomatic relation between Taiwan and China, the US military presence in Taiwan gradually decreased. Under this circumstance, local rock bands gradually lost performing venues due to the decrease in audience numbers.

At the same time, the “Folk Revival” which in the 1960s had spread through the US popular music scene triggered the popularity of Western folk music in Taiwan in the early 1970s. Artists such as Don McLean, Carol King, Bob Dylan, and Joan Baez were well received, whilst more and more young people began playing acoustic guitars

and a growing number of folk restaurants opened, constituting the major infrastructure of this newly emerging scene (Chang, 2003).

Folk singing's popularity coincided with growing nationalist sentiments in Taiwan and the accompanying "Grass Roots Cultural Movement," which can be said to be Taiwanese society's cultural response to a series of diplomatic crises caused by the aforementioned changes in the Cold War dynamic. In this movement, issues concerning identity politics in the making of cultural products were the main targets of the debate (Wu, 2004; Ho and Chang, 2000). In the literary field, scholars and writers debated over the issue of whether the essence of literature should be more realistic as a means to reflect social reality; in the field of folk music, the main issue was shaped by the collective reflection on both the cultural domination of the imported Western music as well as the lack of original music work.

The relatively simple accessibility of folk singing (just one's voice and an acoustic guitar were sufficient) attracted a great number of university students. Swept along by this wave of cultural movement, many students began to engage in song writing. In contrast, most rock bands could not go beyond just performing covers songs. They could not gain the musical legitimacy that folk musicians could achieve through creating meaningful lyrics that resonated with the everyday concerns of the wider audience. In addition, for young students, it was relatively more difficult to gain access to the required and usually expensive musical instruments and the physical space for practicing and performing rock music. Moreover, relevant forms of subcultures of rock were not even fractionally tolerated by the KMT-led martial law regime and the conservative atmosphere of Taiwanese society. For instance, many seemingly rebellious rock images, especially male musicians with long hair, had become the target of police interrogation and were perceived by public opinion as evil (Wu, 2010). Under these circumstances, while folk music gradually gained legitimacy through its political correctness and support from high culture, rock bands were gradually marginalized and had an underground existence, with only a few vendors of pirate copies and niche-based radio programs as forms of distribution (Tsai, 2000: 29).

After 1975, as the Vietnam War came to an end, the US government withdrew all its forces from Taiwan. With the rapid decrease in the main audience, more and more pubs and clubs closed, the number of live venues for bands in this period sharply decreased, and thus most bands disintegrated (Chen, 2002). However, while the

contemporary record industry was developed after the rise of *College Song*—a commercial-oriented sub-faction of folk songs promoted by the record companies, a few competent band players were hired by recording or production studios to become the first generation of session musicians for contemporary popular music production. They worked for the dominant figures of the field—the aforementioned artists of *College Song*—whilst taking the dominant position in the world of rock instrument players.

The Industrialization of Popular Music Production and the Rise of Commercial Rock and Session Musicians

Having once been characterized as “self-exploitation” and “labor intensive,” the development of the state-governed industrial capitalist mode of production significantly contributed to economic growth in Taiwan from the 1960s to the ’80s. From the mid-’70s onward, the middle-class population soared, alongside an increase in national income. This not only brought an increase in purchasing power and wage rates (Wakabayashi, 1994), but also advantageous conditions for the formation of a newly emerging cultural and recreational industry, alongside the rise of a potentially exploitable market.

The folk movement in the 1970s created a heterogeneously constituted music scene, in which intellectuals and university students were both the main performers and audience and were gradually targeted by the newly emerging music industry as a potential pool of both new talent and consumers. After years of marketing research, in 1977, a local record company Synko started to adopt an unprecedented marketing strategy: it targeted the market of university students by organizing the folk-song event entitled the “Golden Rhyme Award” with a combination of contests, record sales and campus touring. This arrangement soon achieved great commercial success—by 1978, it had sold more than a hundred thousand records (which even surpassed some top pop stars at the time) and was soon copied by other record companies. This became an institutionalized pattern of music production: organizing a talent contest in which the prize winners will be offered a contract, and then releasing recording albums and arranging campuses tours for them.

Thanks to the cross-media cooperation—TV, radio programs, and the entertainment press, the embryonic modern popular music industry in Taiwan was gradually taking shape, alongside the sharp increase in the demand for popular music. For instance, “the total sales of records doubled from US\$1.5 million in 1975 to US\$3.37 million in 1980” (Ho, 2003: 124). More and more local record companies were attracted to this market, and with the acknowledgment of the college song as the dominant mode of popular music production, many of the musicians in this era later became dominant figures—Li Tsung-Sheng and Wu Chu-Chu in particular—in the field of popular music production, even up to the present day. Meanwhile, a few production or recording studios were established by famous producers and folk singers, and thereby giving rise to the recording industry in the field of Taiwanese popular music production (Ho and Chang, 2000: 204). It was in this context that a few competent musicians of the marginalized “Western hit bands” were assimilated into the recording industry, and became the first-generation session musicians in the Taiwanese modern popular music industry.

From the late 1970s to the early '80s, the newly emerged market of popular music records grew, with many more newly established record companies competing for market share. In 1982, Rock Records released Lo Ta-Yu's first album *Zhi Hu Zhe Ye*, which was marked by the rich deployment of rock instrumental elements and socially realistic lyrics. The great social transformation triggered by both economic growth and the rise of an opposition movement created advantageous conditions for the public reception of this unprecedented work in the popular music market; the introduction of the concept of “record marketing management” also contributed significantly to its commercial success (Ho and Chang, 2000; Jian, 2002). By actively submitting news stories about the album and the artist to the press and organizing press conferences, Rock Records successfully attracted public attention before reaching sales of 140,000 copies. In 1983, this new marketing pattern was soon reproduced by another newly established record company, UFO Record, when singer Su-Rei's first album *The Same Moonlight* was released. With similar musical content (Lo Ta-Yu also participated in producing this album's lyrics), and with a similar business strategy, this album sold 230,000 copies.

Their commercial success soon triggered the rise of rock band-oriented artists groups, the most famous examples being Li-Ya Ming and Blue Angel, Shue-Yueh and

the Illusion Band, and Chao-Chuan and Red Cross. As the title of these groups connotes (a front man and “his band,” such as Stephen Malkmus and the Jicks), interestingly, the nature of these “bands” was marked by their affiliated status, which was the very product made by the compromise between the artists and the record companies. In these cases, what was actually being sold was the “image” of the band instead of the real musical operation of the band. Apart from live gigs, the band members of these artists barely participated in the process of song-writing and recording. In fact, the actual song-writing was usually undertaken through collaborative work between professional producers, composers, lyricists and only sometimes the singers, whereas the recording of the instrument parts were carried out by session musicians. For these artist groups, allowing the whole band to take part in the actual process of song-writing and recording seemed to be still a dream that had not come true. For example, formed in 1982, the band Red Cross had still to experience a substantial opportunity to take part in the recording process after the release of their second album in 1989. Even from their own point of view, according to their vocalist Chao-Chaun, this situation seemed to be one that was taken for granted, as the competence of the professional session players in studios was obviously out of the real-life band’s league.²³

It was in this context that the aforementioned session musicians had gradually been positioned as the top in the world of rock players. Apart from the guitarist Chiang Chien-Ming who began his musical career in the late 1970s, all the other rock players originated from the era of the Western Hit Bands, when the US Army was still in Taiwan. As the predecessors in the world of rock players, their early entrance into this newly developed music industry somewhat guaranteed their monopolization of the world of session musicians. In the 1980s, rock instrument learners were increasing in number, but given the lack of influential rock bands on the music scene, the contributions these session musicians made to popular music records through rich deployment of heavy rock repertoires—like a 15-second virtuosic solo in Su-Rei’s *Same Moonlight*—thus become idolized examples of the highest accomplishment that only very rarely could local musicians achieve. These musicians were usually labeled as Taiwanese versions of famous Western instrumentalist virtuosos. For example, the session guitarist Yu Cheng-Yen was labeled the Taiwanese version of Ritchie

²³ Red Cross, (1989) Red Cross, *Player Magazine*, No. 3: 3–7.

Blackmore on the basis of his virtuosity in displaying shredding guitar, whilst the other session guitarist Chiang Jien-Ming had once been labeled the Taiwanese version of Eddie Van Halen based on his ability in deploying the skill of tapping in some particular songs.

With the ongoing growth of the record market, the scale of local production of popular music was significantly enlarged. To attain a more efficient allocation of resources and reduce risks and operating costs, record companies started to subsume the musical production organizations, which used to operate independently before the 1980s as stated earlier. These were brought into the record companies' organizational structure by either making alliances with production studios or by hiring famous talent (producers, composers, session musicians, lyricists). This not only triggered the bureaucratization of the organizational operation of record companies marked by a more detailed, *rationalized pattern of division of labor*, but also facilitated the industrialization of local musical production (Ho, 2003). In the late 1980s, the growth of the popular music industry approached its heyday. As Jian noted, the sales figure in the latter half of 1988 had reached the aggregation of that in 1986 and 1987; in 1989, a record that sold 200,000 copies would be regarded as mediocre (Jian, 2002: 144). This situation further facilitated the expansion of the production network in the record industry, and the studio-recording cases and the session musicians' income were also soaring. According to one interviewee, for example, at that time, a top session musician could record more than 2,000 songs while paying taxes of more than 1,700,000 NTD (then around GB£30,000 at the time) in a single year. Featured in its scarce nature alongside the extremely high income, the position of session musician thus became the ultimate target in the career trajectory of those aiming to take music seriously as their career. As this thesis will address in a later chapter, this elevated position enabled these session musicians to define the logic of the learning pattern in the world of rock instruments, which constituted the principal framework of the learning paradigm in the 1990s.

The Rise of Consumer Society and the Development of Rock Infrastructure

On the other side of the story, the development of rock infrastructures at the root level also unfolded. Out of the same driving force brought by marked economic growth, 1980s Taiwanese society experienced an industrial transformation marked by a shift from manufacturing to high-tech industry—initiated by the establishment of the Hsinchu Science and Industrial Park—starting in the late 1970s. With agricultural industry receding, alongside the significant rise of job opportunities in non-agricultural sectors, increasing numbers of the rural unemployed were gradually attracted to urban areas (Wakabayashi, 1994), and subsequently facilitated the process of urbanization as well as “the proliferation of the ‘service industry’ in the cities” together with the development of an “urbanized consumption-oriented consciousness” (Ho, 2003: 141).

In this wave of urbanization, Taiwan’s social scene was marked by the rise of modern consumption spaces, along with the processes of both globalization and the differentiation of targeted consumer groups. These included, for example, fast-food chains McDonald’s, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and 7-Eleven; the newly formed Dong-Chiu (eastern district) shopping zone in Taipei City aimed at the growing number of middle and higher class customers; the youth leisure spaces like indoor ice rinks, dance clubs, and arcade centers in Ximending (western district) in Taipei (Ho, 2003; Wu, 2010). For youth and young adults, the establishment of these consumption spaces resembled the development of not only the infrastructure for them to engage in their leisure activities, but also of an easier access to relevant merchandise. Under these circumstances, various forms of youth subculture were growing and proliferating. These included, for instance, the rise of street dancing and the rise of the public area in Ximending (Wu, 2010), the emergence of “Japanese fever” and the development of shopping malls specializing in the parallel importation of Japanese fashion goods (Li, 2009), as well as the main concern of this research, i.e., the “revival” of rock culture with the development of music shops and live music pubs.

Rock Culture in Local Music Shops

From the early 1980s onward, the market of the music shops started to expand with the growing popularity of rock alongside the rise of rock commodities in the market of popular music. With the growth in household income, both instruments and instrument lessons in these shops became more and more affordable to most parents.

More students on campus, especially guitar club members, started to play rock instruments, which triggered a growing need for rock instrument tutors in these venues. As stated earlier, the career of the session musician was out of reach for most band players at that time. On the other hand, the re-development of live venues was just beginning. Teaching in music shops gradually turned into the starting point of the career for most rock musicians aiming to treat playing instruments as a vocation. Apart from the more experienced musicians who started to play since the era of *Western Hit Music*, the most common pattern of employment in the music shops was to hire the more competent ones among the frequent customers who came to the shop to rent the rehearsal room to conduct band practice.

On the other hand, given the lack of live venues and major events for local bands and fans to engage in rock activities, a few large music shops became “substitute venues,” providing physical spaces for musicians, students, bands, and fans to gather and interact with one another, thereby constituting one of the basic social units for the formation of rock music communities, marked by their idiosyncratic culture and multiple social functions contributing to the development of an emerging rock scene since the 1980s.

First, apart from the business of the instrument sales and lessons, for high school students, music shops were also a concrete physical space where they could hang out. For those who had just embarked on their musical journey, the shops were the only places that seemed to provide specific means of support for the process of their musical cultivation. One 45-year-old professional composer, DW, described the significance of the instrument shops during his high school days in the mid-1980s:

... during most of the after-school hours you could just stay there and talk shit with people, trying out things, trying guitars, trying amps, trying Boss pedals, yeah, that was at the time when Boss started to release single guitar effect pedals one after another. For example, originally there was just the overdrive pedal, later there was the super-overdrive, then distortion ... they were released along with the process of our growth

At the time, the newly established live pubs were a particular kind of venue; they had age restrictions and were legally classified in the same category as those which were

commonly perceived as problematic venues—especially those which provided sexual services. Under this circumstance, rehearsal rooms in music shops were the only places where young rock students could watch a “live event” performed by local bands. Also, given the live venues were still underdeveloped, music shops were significant sites enabling local band players to develop a sense of “where they are” in this growing scene and to accumulate fame by being watched practicing. The experiences of both the bassist of the late 1980s and early ’90s leading heavy rock band, Weiwei of Assassin, and the local guitar virtuoso Pan Shue-Kuan, who published the very first systematic electric guitar tuition book in Taiwan, best illustrated the idiosyncratic culture of “rehearsal watching” in music shops in the ’80s:

Q: You said your band was always making pioneering covers in Taipei at the time, but how did you know what songs other bands were playing, since there were not so many venues for bands like yours to play?

Wei-Wei: We didn’t care what other bands were playing, we just made covers of the hardest ones.

Q: I mean, on what basis can you make this assertion?

Wei-Wei: Because in the music shop, you could hear other bands practicing.

Q: The rehearsal rooms in shops?

Wei-Wei: Yeah, at Dun-Huang Music. There were always a lot of people coming to the music shop to watch us practicing. I tell you what, even during the period of time in which we did not have any gig, people would come to the music shop and ask the staff, “Hey, when will Assassin practice?,” and later there would be a lot of people coming and crowded behind the small window of the rehearsal room watching our band practice.

Pan Shue-Kuan: I remember you guys belonged to the Dun-Huang camp. In my high school days, a classmate of mine took me to the KHS shop. There was one big rehearsal room with massive glass windows, and a guy was sitting there playing a tune of Masayoshi Takanaka [a Japanese guitar virtuoso], and it was freakin’ awesome to me!

Q: Were those who watched your practice usually players?

Wei-Wei: It depends, sometimes it might be those who took instrument lessons in the shop. Or, for instance, sometimes when we knew the Red Cross Band

[winner of the first Yamaha Band Battle, to be discussed later] would rehearse in Dun-Huang, we'd go there during the booked time to see their band practice, to see if they'd made any progress, and we could then compare with us to encourage ourselves.

Q: But wouldn't they shut the door?

Wei-Wei: There was a glass on the wall, you can hear and see through that.

Q: So would you say this move was more of a comparison, or just watching and enjoying the music?

Wei-Wei: For some it might have been enjoying the music, whereas for the others it might have been understanding the situation of your competitors. I would not say it's like prying, but just an act of knowing where you were at among the musicians and bands in the scene.

When the live venues were still underdeveloped, music shops were the center of rock activities, which constituted the very basic units of the early formation of the rock community. With the mediation of musical tastes embedded in the operation of one of the central organizational tasks of instrument shops, i.e. hiring qualified musicians to become teachers, the development of each music shop was to some extent correlated with the gathering of musicians of shared interests in close or similar genres. Take, for instance, the Haikuo music shop, which had been one of the largest music shops from the 1980s to the late '90s—their teaching faculty was composed of those specializing in heavy metal and hard rock, whereas the *Taipei* music shop was marked by staff members' proficient skill in playing blues. While this logic gradually dictated the overall contour of the world of music shops, a micro pattern of taste distinction thereby developed in the emerging rock field. As this thesis will illustrate in the next chapter, this was one of the very basic institutional causes of the system of musical reproduction in the rock field in Taiwan.

The Revival of Performing Venues: The Rise of Live Music Pubs and Cover Musicians

Originating from the UK pub culture, the development of live music pubs in Taiwan corresponded to the process of urbanization around the island in the 1980s. In these newly emerged venues, the main service was to provide alcohol and food to urban

middle-class and foreign customers. In the early development of live pubs, live performance was not a regular element of their service. In his study of covers bands in Taipei City, Chen Hsiao-Wei argued the existence of resident bands in live pubs was actually an historical contingency (Chen, 2002: 16 in Chapter 4). After the 1980s, an increasing number of migrant workers and students were living in Taiwan. The emergence of a newly emerged recreational space soon attracted them to leisure activities during their post-work/study hours. Among these foreign customers, many were already proficient in playing rock instruments back in their home country. To them, the rise of newly developed live pubs offered exactly the kind of “social hub” in which they could gather together and form rock bands to play. It was through this historical contingency that they became members of the first wave of rock revival in Taiwan during the ’80s. As the market of live rock performance in live pubs significantly expanded—especially after the advent of the Yamaha Band Competition in 1986 (discussed in the following section), the demand for rock bands grew with the increasing establishment of similar kind of venues (Chen, 2002). Many live pubs which opened in this era later became significant venues for local rock musicians to develop their musical career, the most famous being those gathered in Taipei city center, such as *The Pig & Whistle* (犁舍) and *The Ploughman Inn* (犁原). The majority of customers in these venues sought only regular recreation (drink and dancing) rather than a niche-based musical experience. Musicians thus needed to prepare a great number of songs across diverse genres to comply with the requests made by audiences and employers, ranging from classic western hit songs (e.g. Eagles’ “Hotel California”) or the Mandarin top-chart songs.

The development of live pubs created an avenue for local musicians to earn more than reasonable pay through performing covers music (Chen, 2002). Along with the rise of music shops and contemporary recording industry, it also contributed to the formation of a hierarchical career trajectory for playing rock instruments which was composed of three types of career options: music shop teachers, session musicians, and covers musicians. Compared to the Western Hit Music from the 1950s to the ’70s, the development of the infrastructure and relevant career types for rock music in the 1980s can be seen as significant objective conditions for the reproduction of rock culture. They created not only substantive space for rock participants to gather and

interact with each other, but also viable job opportunities for musicians playing rock instruments, hence facilitating the reproduction of this foreign (sub)culture.

The Advent of the Yamaha Band Battle and the Legitimization of Rock

After the mid-1980s, with the ongoing challenge brought by the opposition movement and various types of social protest, plus the continuous external pressure brought by the intervention of the US government, the KMT-led authoritarian regime gradually loosened its grip on Taiwanese society, and a process of political liberalization was initiated. In 1986, the Democratic Progressive Party was formed and became the first official party not suppressed by the KMT government. In the next year, the KMT government proclaimed the lifting of martial law, which had been enforced for 38 years since 1949; later in 1988, the KMT government further proclaimed the lifting of the ban on newspaper publications. In this process of liberalization, the “state–society relation” gradually become a problematic issue for the KMT regime, as the outmoded governmental technology deployed in the martial-law era gradually lost its legitimacy and was no longer effective. For the party-state, the diversified forms of emerging youth subculture were one of the very central dimensions of this issue. In the 1960s, when Taiwanese society was still under the strict grip of the martial-law regime, direct suppression undertaken through state violence was the most usual approach to deal with different forms of youth subculture deemed as potential threats to the social order. Hippies, rockers, homosexuals, or any sort of subcultural group were treated by both the state and the society as similar to hooligans whose extraordinary style of dress, such as men having long hair, or wearing bell-bottom jeans, was usually described as evil and would directly lead to arrest by police officers to receive “correction” (Wu, 2010). However, in the turbulent context of the social transformation of the 1980s, with the pace of liberalization and the advent of consumer society, different forms of youth culture were growing, along with different modes of interaction between students, family, and schools, as well as increasing juvenile incidents. While the state was busy dealing with the ongoing opposition movements and social protests, direct suppression appeared to be less effective, and new strategies for disciplining the growing youth culture were urgently needed. After the lifting of martial law, the KMT government gradually developed a series of strategies to govern the irresistible growth

of popular and youth culture: assimilating and transforming these diversified forms of popular culture into legitimate leisure activities which could be utilized as advertising tools to reshape the KMT government's public image. It was in this context that the China Youth Anti-Communist National Salvation Corps (CYC, hereafter), which had once been an quasi-governmental organization with close ties to the KMT party, started to co-organize the first Yamaha Band Battle (YBB, hereafter) with the Ministry of Education and the Yamaha Corporation (Yamaha, hereafter) in 1987.

The initiation of this event can be seen as an alliance between the political regime and commercial capital with the clear agenda of "transforming this growing youth culture into a legitimized, profitable leisure activity." Prima facie, commercial capital could be applied to the role that Yamaha played in this event. Indeed, according to the evidence collected through interviews with Yamaha's staff, for Ms. Sun, who was in charge of this competition, the main appeal of Yamaha taking part in this event was to promote their instruments in the market which was continually growing in the 1980s. However, from the first year onward, as Sun indicates in the interview, Yamaha's role in this event was more of contributing to public welfare, i.e. to promote and maintain this "legitimate youth leisure activity," as their instrument sales never significantly benefited from their engagement in this event. This situation was fairly understandable; after all, the rock instruments market has long been dominated by a few embedded brands, especially Fender and Gibson, which had been fabricated with particular versions of rock authenticity. Therefore, in a rigorous sense, Yamaha Corporation did not actually benefit from promoting this event. In fact, the real beneficiaries of the commercial capital side in this event were the record companies through the intermediary roles played by famous session players and producers who were, on the one hand, invited by the event organizers to be juries, and on the other hand, the agents for their record companies could find profitable new talent—similar to the Golden Rhyme Award in the College Song era. However, before further illuminating how the rock activities of the participant bands were framed with this agenda, there is a need to look at the role and the meaning of CYC in Taiwanese history.

CYC and Youth Leisure

Since its initial establishment by the former KMT president Chiang Kai-Shek in 1952, CYC was designed as a highly politicalized organization with two functions that served the ultimate end of “recovering Mainland China” from the Communists’ hands. First, it played the role of the supplement organization affiliated to the party-state regime that took charge of mobilizing and controlling young people and students who might potentially be a source of political dissent. Second, it also served as the political organization for Chiang Kai-Shek’s son, Chiang Chin-Kuo, to accumulate his political capital in preparation for his future inheritance of the leadership of the party-state. After the status of Chiang Chin-Kuo as being the top priority of the successor was stabilized after the 1970s, CYC was transformed into an organization which provided leisure services for the youth and students. This aimed to assimilate young people into the grip of the party-state regime or at least to prevent them from being mobilized by political rivals to threaten the established social order (Wakabayashi, 1994; Wu, 1987).

The main aim of CYC’s involvement in YBB was clear: as the music critic Yu commented, it aimed to “enlist the growing rebellious energy of the youth and turn them into a positive, depoliticized kind of youth leisure” (Yu, 1992: 94). The speech made by CYC’s leader, Dr. Li Chung-Kuei, who was also a member of the central committee of the KMT party, before the beginning of the second YBB in 1988, best illustrates the rationale behind the involvement of CYC in this event:

... the energetic, dynamic feature of rock can be said as what best corresponded to the vigor and passion of the youth. It was hoped this event [the YBB] could satisfy youth’s dream of pursuing self-fulfillment and self-development, and further help in promoting legitimate leisure activities. (*Ming Sheng Daily*, March 30, 1988: 10)

Legitimization and Institutionalization: An Emerging Route to the Dream of Becoming Rock Stars?

Of course, it is hard to imagine that these sorts of official doctrines would in any sense be relevant to the interests of young rockers, especially for the majority of participants who had long been immersed in the heavy metal subcultures. For them, the real stake of their active, enthusiastic involvement in this event was what this event seemed to

be able to offer their *musical career*, i.e. a great performing opportunity on a stadium-sized stage, prizes and an opportunity to earn a contract. At the time, the aforementioned live pubs were still in early development and the musical activities of the majority of bands and musicians could not go beyond the underground world and hence seriously lacked performing venues. Under this circumstance, the advent of this event was emblematic of the coming of an epochal era for rock culture in Taiwan. The professional composer, DW, who was the founder of the KC Rock Club back in his high school days (see Chapter 5), vividly explained how the establishment of the Yamaha Band Battle facilitated the legitimization and institutionalization of rock music, and what this meant to young rockers at the time:

Let me put it this way, it was as if, for example, everybody had long been playing street basketball in the basketball court under the bridge. Suddenly, we had our own league, a league like the NBA, and later we had the champion of the first-year tournament. And it was like, as one of our senior members in the club once told us, that they had played street basketball with these guys, and now they had become the fucking national champion. To us, it was like this situation, a situation marked by the process from unofficial to official. Suddenly, you've got official recognition. To make an analogy again, it was as if everybody was immersed in studying, and later there was the first-year imperial exam which created the top candidate to become the model for everyone to learn from. And most importantly, what we had done for many years had finally been recognized as having substantial value.

He then goes deeper into what this meant to them in the musical dimension:

... see, Chang Yu-Sheng²⁴ was such a talented singer with an extremely high pitch; and the voice of Chao Chuan²⁵ was so powerful. They proved to us that, we, as Taiwanese people, can also achieve what we could only approach through the radio, records, and magazines ... and gradually, we started to compare, who

²⁴ The vocalist of the best band in the second-year battle who also won the prize of best vocalist and later earned a contract with Rock Record.

²⁵ The vocalist of Red Cross, the winner of the best band in the first-year battle.

could play the guitar faster, who could play the bass in a more virtuosic way. These may seem very common in the present day; however, they were shocking to us, especially in the context of the popular music production at the time ... it was just like, at that time, all those you could only enjoy with very few peers with similar interests finally appearing in the mainstream, and we used to complain music in Taiwan was falling far behind other countries, but then, we were able to do the same thing.

In his article on the history of the development of heavy metal in Taiwan, the local music critic, Lo Yueh-Chuan, sharply criticized the naively enthusiastic participation of the young rockers in YBB as an ironic picture of “a bunch of rock bands asking for prizes in rebellious gestures from a group of educational bureaucracies, KMT party cadres, and capitalists” (Lo, 1992: 94). Similarly, the Taiwanese music sociologist, Ho Tung-Hung, also commented that rock bands submitted themselves to the record companies to present their musical products in rather apolitical gestures in this period (Ho and Chang: 2000). In a certain dimension, these comments might be right, as some parts of the rock elements presenting particular behavior or dress codes might not have been welcomed in this event. For instance, in the early years of the battles, “long hair” (the most common trait of heavy metal culture) might have been one disadvantageous factor for male participants, even when the majority of songs played in the battle were in the heavy metal genre. However, this line of argument failed to capture what all this meant to young rockers at the time, as well as the question of what really mattered to them. As the quoted interview shows, politics was not exactly the central concern of young rockers. For them, the real stakes in the Yamaha Band Battle were, first, the acquisition of an official status of what used to only be able to exist in the underground world, and second, an opportunity to transform the status of their beloved rock elements, as the high pitch vocal and the fuzz guitar in the eyes of Deep White, emerged from what once belonged to an underground culture into a publicly recognized sphere of activity with substantial rewards.

At the time, especially when many teenagers and young adults were inspired by their rock heroes to pick up their instruments, the market status of bands such as Bon Jovi or Guns N’ Roses soon became imagined final destinations for their musical

achievement after years of practice, i.e. to stand up in front of tens of thousands of people on a stadium-sized stage as Bon Jovi did in Japan in 1985. The bassist of the one of the top local heavy metal bands, Weiwei of Assassin, illustrated how they were inspired to persist in their musical journey when these bands were in their heyday:

... our band leader kept encouraging me by saying, “Look, how old are Bon Jovi’s band, they are not much older than us and they’ve already played in the Super Rock in Japan. We will be there soon, we definitely will, there is no much gap between us and them.”

It was in this historical context that YBB represented the fastest route for them to achieve the dream of becoming rock stars. In particular, the composition of the jury of this event were musicians, regarded as bridges to fame, as they themselves were all famous producers and session musicians affiliated to specific record companies, such as the producer and singer songwriter Lee Tsung-Sheng, the chairman of the UFO limited Wu Chu-Chu who was also a producer and singer songwriter, the session guitarist Yu Cheng-Yen, and the session drummer Huang Rei-Feng. In this event, the roles they played were not only as jury members who set the musical standards to mark the performance of the participating bands and musicians, but also as gatekeepers for the record companies that they represented. However, the main concern of these gatekeepers was not rock music, but finding profitable and marketable talents. As the aforementioned Ms. Sun clearly indicated in the interview:

Besides marking, the real intention of the record companies sending these musicians and producers to our event was to discover potential new talent. For them, the most ideal situation was to pick the best ones from each band and then integrate them into a super band.

In the early years of this battle, there were indeed a few participants who earned contracts with record companies, but only in the forms of either individual members from different bands, as Sun indicated, or individual singers split from the original bands. According to Ms. Sun, based on the established criteria in recording studios dictated by masterly session musicians, a band is always composed of members with

uneven competence. Therefore, it was easier for the record company to manage just an individual singer than the whole band. The band Oriental Express, and singers such as Chang Yu-Sheng, Chao Chuan, and Tai Cheng-Hsiao all embarked on their musical career on the basis of this logic. Moreover, even though most of the winners had been sincere heavy metal musicians before their exposure in the battle, they were all transformed by the record companies into the image of positive, vigorous youth who were eager to praise their youthfulness through musical works of clichéd themes which exactly conformed to the official doctrines endorsed by the CYC. Chang Yu-Sheng's hit "My Future Is Not a Dream," Oriental Express's hit "Knocking the Red Youthfulness," and the theme song "Firing Youthfulness" of the 1988 Yamaha Battle were all products of the aforementioned rationale of a "legitimized, profitable leisure activity."

Concluding Remarks

The industrialization of popular music production and the rise of the leisure industry can be said to be the main driving forces that paved the way for the development of the infrastructure of rock culture around this island, by respectively giving rise to available career options and a specific infrastructure for the development of idiosyncratic forms of local rock culture. These were the increasing need for session musicians' devotion to the popular music industry alongside the growing popularity of rock commodities; and the relevant careers and social venues with the rise of music shops and the live pubs. Alongside the rise of the Yamaha Band Battle, rock in Taiwan was not only officially legitimized, but also institutionalized. As we will see in the next chapter, the rise of the Yamaha Band Battle successfully mobilized the participation of young students, including both high school and university students, and rock-oriented clubs in school campuses started to soar in number and became the other basic unit for the formation of the local rock community. A heteronormous field gradually took shape through the growing connection between these organizational units—YBB, record industry, live pubs, music shops, and school clubs—with the rise of the collective cult of virtuosity and the value hierarchy among different genres, and

the games of jockeying for position in the field of rock music production therefore ensued.

Chapter 5

The Formation of the High School Rock Field in Taiwan

Professional Conventions, the Cult of Instrumental Virtuosity, and the Rise of the High School Rock Field

In the previous chapter, we looked at the historical development of rock music in Taiwan, particularly in terms of how this process had taken place along with the rise of local rock culture and certain types of musical careers which were deeply intertwined with the economical and political development of Taiwanese society in the 1980s. In this chapter, I will turn our focus to the “content” of the musical practice of this rising culture which was shaped and maintained institutionally, as well as the emerging forms of musical distinction alongside the rise of the high school rock culture. This examination will be divided into three parts. The first part will illustrate how the cult of instrumental virtuosity in this period was relevant to the organizational logic of Yamaha Band Battle and several career options that constituted a hierarchical ladder for local rock instrumentalists to develop their musical career. This is followed by analysis of the musical distinctions and legitimization, the very basis that underpinned the collectively shared aesthetic belief on instrumental virtuosity. I will demonstrate how instrumental virtuosity had been consecrated and valorized as legitimate symbolic capital that dictated the way rock musicians made value judgments in this period. Finally, I will then show how rock music became a thriving subcultural form for local youth, with the intersection of rock’s growing popularity in the mainstream market and the rise of the local indie scene. Such a process, as I will demonstrate, was the very socio-historical genesis of the rise of high school rock culture in Taiwan.

Yamaha Band Battle and the Cult of Instrumental Virtuosity

The arrival of Yamaha Band Battle seemed to provide a “stairway” to a record contract for aspiring musicians. However, from its very beginning in 1986 onward, hardly any record contracts were signed between the winning band and the record company;

instead record contracts were mostly offered to the “lead vocals” of the winning bands, while the remaining band instrumentalists were usually reduced to appearing as the backing band for the lead vocal in live concerts and had no part in the studio recording, as they were considered to have failed to meet the recording studios’ technical standards, as dictated by the session players. In fact, this event brought no substantial benefit to the career development of the participating “bands,” and even led to winning bands breaking up after the record companies offered contracts to the lead vocalists.

Nonetheless, Yamaha Band Battle was still the most highly regarded event among young aspiring musicians throughout the second half of the 1980s and into the ’90s. Apart from YBB, there was no other large-scale event which could gather so many musicians and rock aficionados from around this island (Kuan, 2010). While only around ten bands would be selected from the regional preliminary contest to reach the final, only a few best out of the many from around the island were eligible to make an appearance at this significant event. Therefore, this event can be said to be offering what seemed to be a concrete route for local rockers to pursue their dreams of becoming rock stars, despite the fact that this route was very different from the way fame was achieved on western rock scene, that is, by being discovered by the A&R of any influential record label and then invested in to produce a huge act (Frith, 1981, 2001; Cohen, 1991).

In terms of prizes, apart from the three top-ranked awards, the introduction of awards for best vocal, best guitarist, best bassist, best drummer, and best keyboard player also provided substantial opportunities for exposure for band instrumentalists. As Lisa McCormick argues, “in both popular and high art musical genres, competition prizes are staples of promotional media, resumes, and biographies of aspiring and professional musicians alike” (McCormick, 2009: 6). An instrument award could be a useful credit for someone in developing their career in the musical job market, either to earn a place in a professional covers band or become a session musician, which would also open up opportunities for teaching enthusiastic followers and hence generate more revenue for maintenance. Thus, even though the prize did not bring substantial advantages to the career development of the awarded bands, it could still be beneficial to the career development of *individual* band members who were prize winners. Especially when there were not many substantial routes for musicians to develop their careers, winning a prize in YBB became a central goal for which young

musicians would be willing to dedicate their energy and time in band practicing. As the music critic Lo Yueh-Chuan puts it:

Young campus musicians in the folk era used to expect for the annual Golden Rhyme Award; when it came to the plugged era, in every year, youth band players were sharpening their weapons (meaning rock instruments such as electric guitar, electric bass, and drum sets) [author's translation] for the Yamaha Band Battle. (Lo, 2000: 208)

The rationale for the prizes in YBB was a manifestation of the rationalized musical division of labor brought by the modern popular music industry's arrival in Taiwan during the 1980s. The establishment of the various instrument prizes embodied the conception of a specific pattern of musical production, marked by effective and precise collaboration between professionalized personnel (including singers, session musicians, song writers, and producers) under the gaze of a super-producer. In the previous chapter, I discussed how the rise of modern popular music industry in Taiwan during the 1980s was carried out with the development of the *records marketing management* and the rationalized mode of musical division of labor. In such a pattern, the actual process of musical production was undertaken to conform to the image designed by the marketing management plan: the musicians—including instrumentalists and vocals—were expected to be effective executors of already arranged musical projects who carried out their task with technical competence and proficiency.

The intention behind the record companies' participation in this event lay not in their musical interest in rock, but in exploring profitable talents. In fact, they considered rock bands as unmanageable in their organizational frame due to the bands' relatively democratic nature, in which too many personal opinions were tolerated (Tsai, 2001). The ideal model for the record companies to manage the prize winners was to gather the best of each instrument position from the event to form a "super band" under the producer's guidance. The formation of the band Oriental Express was the perfect example: in this band, the members were all prize winners from different bands during the late 1980s, and their "hits" were the very product of the collaboration between professionalized personnel.

Within such an institutional context, for each candidate band, it was only by arranging as many solo parts as possible for each instrument position of the band that the potential winning prizes was enhanced. It also ensured that each band member, no matter what their instrument position, shared the equal right to display their best to compete for the instrument prize.

These prize also facilitated the development of heavy genres in Taiwan. In the history of Anglophone popular music's reception in Taiwan, the pattern of the popularity of musical genres in Taiwan had long been dictated by the American Billboard Chart (Ho & Chang, 2000). Thus the musical taste of the Taiwanese youngsters was thus defined by heavy metal, which was in its heyday in the American popular music market throughout the 1980s (Yu, 1992). For rock musicians, this was also reinforced by the growing popularity of a famous Japanese magazine, *Young Guitar Magazine*, which offered instruction in playing techniques and chart rock tunes' tablature, with exclusive emphasis on heavy metal. The musical repertoires of bands such as Bon Jovi, Guns n' Roses, Skidrow, Whitesnake, and Mr. Big were thus revered as "must-learn" acts by young musicians and further facilitated the shaping of a specific rock image and performance: high-pitched vocals with instrumentalist heroes who were masters of instrumental virtuosity—guitarists in particular. For the juries in YBB, the emphasis on instrumental virtuosity in the heavy genres was what allowed them to more easily evaluate each participant's technical competence, as it would encourage the musicians to present their best playing techniques. Therefore, from YBB's very first year and even up to the present day, the majority of prize winners were heavy metal and hard rock bands. As one staff of YBB comments:

It would be best to understand the status of heavy metal from jury's point of view. For them, these were genres that could make every member of the band more inclined to present their highest playing techniques. In other words, the average standard of each band's musical ability can be more easily observed.

So, heavy metal and hard rock, given their aesthetic characteristics in comparison to other genres, can be said as the very two genres which were relatively able to aesthetically satisfy this organizational mediated condition—emphasizing instrument solos in order to compete for the instrumentalist award—without creating too much

inappropriate arrangement in this situation. Conversely, bands playing musical styles with a different aesthetic emphasis might seem awkward or even irrelevant in this institutional context. For example, in the finals of the 1999 YBB, a local indie-pop band called Losing Control even “apologized” to the whole audience and the jury before they started to play because “there is not any solo in this song.” After the mid-1990s, even when more and more non-metal band were participating in YBB, long, virtuosic instrument solos was still predominated in this event, whether they fit the genre context or not.

The Hierarchical Ladder of Musical Career Development and Ideal Musicianship

The advent of YBB allowed the musical practice of the young talents at the time to be seen, appreciated, and evaluated institutionally. However, this only happened in one particular event every year. In the context of everyday life, young musicians’ careers were developed through the options stated in the previous chapter, including session musicians, covers musicians, and instrumental teachers. Before the rise of the local indie music scene in the late 1990s, the occupational conventions created by these career options’ organizational requirements dictated both the pedagogical practice and musical tastes of young rock musicians.

The relationship between these occupational positions constituted a hierarchical ladder for musical career development: from the position of instrument teacher which could be easily filled by a college student with sufficient playing techniques, to that of studio session musicians marked by exceptional skills and high income. Though the musical conventions of each career type were somewhat different from each other, they were not mutually exclusive. They constituted a trajectory of a musical career development—the convention of each stage could be seen as the preparatory course for the next level, with the emphasis on instrumental virtuosity. In particular, the ability to sight-read and to adapt quickly to different sorts of situation when playing live covers could be highly relevant to the skills and techniques needed in the professional studio session.

Of course, this trajectory was usually not a smooth one. Apart from learnt musical competence, the social connections made in these contexts were also of

extreme importance for local musicians in these trades. Particularly for live cover and session musicians, job opportunities for newcomers usually relied on being introduced to other musicians or workers at relevant venues. In these trades, “*dai-ben*” (代班) was the most common way for a newcomer to start their career, which meant cover for some else’s shift in a live covers show or in a live session opportunity. The rationale behind “*dai-ben*” was that a more experienced musician would be more likely to miss one of their increasing session opportunities due to scheduling conflicts, and thus the ever-increasing numbers of newcomers were useful candidates to fill these “unexpected” vacancies. *Dai-ben* opportunities usually emerged at the very last moment, when one or more band members failed to follow the pre-arranged schedule. This situation made this kind of temporary job offer a great opportunity for newcomers to demonstrate their competence, as it required them to be able to step into the gap left by the absent band member, without sufficient preparatory work. One famous session musician, Mr. Lu, recalls his very early days in getting into this business:

Q: You just mentioned “*dai-ben*,” I think it’s a very interesting part.

Lu: It’s not interesting at all! Before I started to do *dai-ben*, I’d also tried several part-time jobs like petrol station attendant or working in McDonald’s, to maintain my basic living cost. At the time I’d already known a few senior musicians at a music shop where I used to hang out. One day, one of their bandmates couldn’t make it, so they needed a *dai-ben*, then I was told by them to try it out. This kind of job opportunity only exists in the situation when someone from the band, who is supposed to memorize the notations of the song, cannot make it; when you cover his shift, what you need to do is just go to the venue, and get the scores, and the gig just starts and you don’t even have any chance to make proper preparation.

Q: So the premise of this kind of job opportunity is that someone in the band cannot make it. But from what you said, it sounds like a very good opportunity.

Lu: Yes, and you can directly display how well you can play in front of the senior musicians. The more your ability is observed, the better chance that they will keep your number and always think of you first when they need a *dai-ben*. And surely when some other bands have the same demand, your name has even more

chance to be mentioned in this circle. When I started to become quite busy after the '90s, I also started to find some other newcomers to cover my shift ... anyway, this is also a kind of social culture, you try to befriend as [many people] as you can and then you might be able to gain more job opportunities.

Compared to the usual contract-based jobs, the majority of job opportunities in the music business were marked by their freelance nature. Thus, one was usually not confined to a particular occupational type, but needed to shuttle between different work contexts to accumulate both work experience and connections to *seek better chances*. Mr. Lu continues on his lifestyle during in his early career development:

In the one to two years before I was enrolled to do my military service, I used to play in a hotel during the daytime ... the Li-Chun Hotel was located around the Linsen North Road. I played bossa nova in the afternoon at that hotel [wearing] proper suits, and then changed to wearing t-shirts and jeans in the early evening before I went to the pubs to do rock covers. The range of my work content was very broad, and shortly after that period of time, there was some producers from local major labels [began to] appreciate the way I played. I was then called into the studio, and that was when the turning point of my life began.

Mr. Lu's "turning point of life" meant no doubt the opportunity to develop his career in the recording session trade. Up to the present day, to become a session player has long been the most desirable career option for those who aimed to make a living playing popular music instruments. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, Taiwan's popular music industry experienced an unprecedented prosperity marked by extremely high volumes of record sales, with a corresponding increase in session job opportunities. However, these job opportunities were largely monopolized by only a few "super" session musicians due to a particular type of bureaucratic rationality, which is also noted by Peterson and White in their studies of the Nashville's recording industry in the 1970s: given the high cost of using professional studios, it was only by relying on trustworthy musicians that the conceived risk of wasting time and money could be reduced (Peterson and White, 1979).

In contrast to the commonly perceived stereotype of musicians experiencing economic instability and inferior social status, it was under this “skewed reward structure” (ibid: 412) that the position of session musician was perceived to be the guarantee of both job security and a high income, placing the session musician’s symbolic status at the highest level. As Mr. P, a famous guitar virtuoso in the 1990s, illustrates:

Session was the most desirable [post] for every instrumentalist, it was the highest point for a musical career, with the hardest entry barrier for one to access. When I was young, every time I listened to the cassette tape, I would take particular notice of the names of the session players who participated in producing the songs in the album through reading the lyric book. I always felt that those names were just very far beyond my reach.

While “to become a session” has emerged as the ultimate achievement for anyone who wanted to make a living in the music industry, relevant patterns of musical operations and standards of aesthetic evaluation had thus been elevated as hegemonic dogma in the sphere of learning to play rock instruments. The first was the common emphasis on one’s ability to understand musical theory based on western classical music, and to use music theory to solve puzzles in harmony structures. This, again, was also relevant to the institutional characteristic of session work embedded in the pattern of the division of labor in the newly developed music industry in the 1980s. As stated earlier, musicians were expected to perform previously arranged musical projects, and to carry out their task with technical competence and proficiency in order to produce standardized, easy-accepted musical products. Therefore, the ability to precisely use music theory to “calculate” the right tones to make, and to avoid notes that might conflict with the song’s rationalized structure based on western music theory, were thus very essential in achieving this goal.

Moreover, some musical requirements mediated by the particular usage of musical technologies and instrument in the studio environment were treated as hegemonic dogma in the sphere of learning to play rock instruments. The most prominent example of this was the excessive emphasis on the use of a “click.” While recording practice in Taiwan had long been dominated by the standard multi-track

recording, the metronome click has long played the central role in the effective coordination of musicians involved in recording projects. Thus, to play an instrument following the metronome as precisely as possible has thus been the very first premise in this trade. In pedagogical practice, following the metronome also had long been the very basic and necessary lesson for any beginners of popular music instruments. In the world of popular musicians, to follow the metronome properly was the first parameter for judging whether one “can” play or not; struggling to keep with the “click” was a sign of musical inferiority or apparent lack of basic competence. Mr. P recalls his very first lesson in a music shop:

In my first lesson, the teacher came into the classroom with a click. It then started ticking, and it sounded like “tah, tah, tah, tah.” The teacher then asked me to repeat playing the notes “Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La, Si, Do” with the click. At first, it might seem to be easy for you, but the longer you play, the harder it is for you to stick with the click. Afterwards, I gradually realized that it was very important for every player, because it is just a very basic ability in recording studios.

Session musicians of this period rarely write their own songs. However, because of the difference between session musicians’ musical practice and that of covers musicians, the session musicians’ musical practice was somehow understood as a type of song writing. This further constituted a commonly shared version of the idea of song writing marked by the entry barrier defined by the musical requirements in the recording studios. As Mr. Shi, a senior recording engineer contends:

... any musician must first have learnt as many techniques and repertoires as he can from the majority of musical genres and be able to play his instrument in the way that meets the technical standard of the recording studio; then he can start to conduct song writing practices.

This discourse, again, explains why the majority of the recording works of rock albums in the 1980s were not recorded by band members themselves, but by session musicians. The following passage from the interview of the famous “Taiwan’s King of Drums,” Huang Rei-Feng, best illustrates this idea:

Q: We all know it is quite normal that in the music industry in the western world, musicians or band players of a very young age can record in the studios *on their own* [italics added]—does this mean that they have already been well trained?

Huang: Let me put it in this way. For the complete process of becoming a player, they need to go through a series of procedure step by step. This includes the basic training, absorbing the basic ideas, from the level of beginners, [then] mid-level, together with the accumulation of the experience, then to the state of perfection. It is very similar to the developmental process of a child, you know a child can perform a speech, but his age, skill, and experience is far less than an adult. I am not saying that he is not good enough, but it means he is still in the state of being a child, or say, state of youth, rather than state of perfection. What is the state of perfection then? That is the source of your music, your musical materials. For example, if today you were asked to record a song in a Mexican style, would you be able to do it right away? And then a Spanish [style] tomorrow?

In this occupational system, musicianship, or the qualification to become a proper player, was understood as something that was needed to be acquired through the step-by-step accumulation of musical repertoires of different technical levels in various genres, and all of these were acquired in a linear learning process regardless of genre difference. It was a musical manifestation of a hierarchical ladder constituted by the above-mentioned careers, shaped and maintained through a series of career conventions. These career options constituted not only a route of career development that confined the range of the choices of musical repertoires of local musicians, but also a system of aesthetic hierarchy with which different musical elements and repertoires were attributed with different values.

Instrument Virtuosity as Symbolic Capital

The earlier part of this chapter is an institutional analysis of how the way rock musicians learned throughout the 1990s is related to the idea that musicians were expected to be proficient executors of musical tasks of either live covers or recording

sessions. Such an idea, as is also argued in the previous chapter, was the organizational demand created by the specific pattern of coordination in the newly developed popular music industry in Taiwan after the 1980s. In particular, the idea and conventional patterns of “rock bands” musical practices—with the commonly perceived thread of making original material—was in conflict with this organizational pattern, and as a result, only very rarely could “rock musicians” escape from the grasp of the musical conventions of both YBB and the aforementioned career options. The emphasis upon the relationship between the established artistic convention and the supportive network in Becker’s social world theory (1982) is helpful for illuminating such institutional constraint. In this theoretical framework, the successful existence of a specific type of artistic production depends on the collaboration between available personnel, institutions, and technology in a network supported by the shared convention. The more one’s artistic repertoires deviate from the convention, the less support and reward s/he can attain. In the early 1990s Taiwanese music scene, any alternative musical attempt, e.g. song-writing or making covers of new genres, would be seriously discouraged due to the lack of supportive venues, audiences, events, record labels, and the reward system which is indispensable for the maintenance of any type of artistic production.

Concrete as the institutional analysis is, however, what is missing here is the artistic legitimacy of these musical conventions, as well as the dimension of the sense of distinction embodied in their musical practice. As the history of the development of western rock can be marked by the ideological antagonism towards “pop” and the emphasis on originality and, most importantly, the autonomy marked by “rock for rock’s sake,” then there is a need to ask following questions: what is the nature of the musical distinction of local rock culture in this period? Why, and how, could local young students of rock instruments be inspired by western rock music to dedicate themselves to playing rock music and to disdain pop on the one hand, but at the same time they did not question the common pedagogy of playing rock instruments during this period, which was characterized by an extreme lack of originality and creativity, and was very obviously ‘not for rock’s sake’ and instead pop-oriented? If we are to understand rock as a particular kind of cultural production based on its antagonistic position to pop, how could local session musicians, who had almost never written their

own songs, treat making pop music as their main trade on the one hand, and maintain their authoritative status in the pedagogical sphere of rock on the other?

To answer these questions, we need to look at the way that rock was understood and received by young students of this period in Taiwan. The history of the development of western rock from the 1980s to the mid-'90s could be characterized by the coexistence of the popularity of heavy rock and the rise of indie-genres. In Taiwan, as stated earlier, western rock music's local reception was mainly based on the popularity of heavy metal. In the West, heavy metal was once developed along the thread of an emphasis on technological effect and instrumental virtuosity inherited from 1970s psychedelic rock, that later differentiated into several sub-genres and stylistic groups with somewhat different foci in the 1980s, ranging from the focus on bourgeois love in soft metal, to the mythic cults and Satanism in extreme metal (Bennett, 2001). In Taiwan, however, the reception of heavy metal evolved mainly around the emphasis on technical traits, including the high-pitched vocal, instrumental virtuosity, power beats, distorted sounds, and so forth.

The pattern of musical distinction in this wave of the reception of western rock music in Taiwan was mainly based on the demarcation between heavy metal band sounds and the production of pop idols. In distinction to the excessive emphasis on the personal characteristics in the popular music production with advent of the "new idols' era in the late 80s" (M. Jian, 2001: 140–41), heavy metal's instrumental traits were thus perceived by local young rockers as being what made "rock music" unique. The emphasis on instrumental virtuosity in heavy metal, as Will Straw notes, is reflected upon a series of evident traits that could be traced back to the groups on the periphery of psychedelia, which included:

... the cult of leading guitarist, the "power trio" and other indices of the emphasis on virtuosity, the "supergroup" phenomena, and the importance in performance of extended solo playing and a disregard for the temporal limits of the pop song. (Straw, 1990: 97)

Furthermore, with a few particular lines of the genre development marked by the appropriation of classical music repertoires, the dimension of the emphasis on instrumental virtuosity had even become what made this genre appear more musically

“legitimate and serious” in relation to the other sub-genres of popular music (Walser, 1992; 1993). Under such a musical paradigm, rock was understood by local young rockers as the equivalent of the virtuosic solo or any other virtuosic elements, which required one to invest significant amount of time and energy in practice on the one hand, and gave them the sense of being a master musician on the other. The majority of pop music songs widely received by popular audience, on the contrary, were the kind of easy-listening, superficial music that set a very low technical barrier marked by excessive emphasis on the seemingly unskilled, but good-looking, singers. As Yu (1992) comments:

At the time, an interesting idea was spread among the band players in Taiwan: starting a band to play heavy metal. These players were mainly students and young adults, who disliked the featureless Mandarin pop songs and already commercialized College Songs and were all engaging in playing covers of the songs of famous heavy metal bands. There is a question: why [were they] making covers instead of song-writing? At the time, both rock fans and rockers themselves all treated the imitation of playing techniques as the highest principle in making musical value judgment. The winner would always be the one who made the most faithful covers. (Yu, 1992: 92)

Therefore, for the young rock aficionados of this period, the musical distinction perceived in their musical practice was based on whether there were elements of instrumental virtuosity in the musical composition. The young students of rock expected songs to contain skillful instrumental solos; otherwise, the song would be considered as “pop rubbish” produced for the bland mass audience who lacked musical competence to listen to music properly.

Here, musical competence can act in parallel to what Bourdieu says about artistic perception, the cultivation of which is based on acquiring the ability to decode the artistic object (Bourdieu, 1968). For instrument players, learning to play rock instruments means a process of absorbing the instrumental skills and techniques deployed in song production. It is in this process that their ability to decode the songs is gained, and the learnt skills and techniques constitute the aesthetic standard of their musical perception. These abilities, as Bourdieu elaborates in his later development of

the framework of field analysis, are “cultural capitals in the embodied state” of which the accumulation requires one to experience the labor of inculcation and assimilation, so that one can convert the lesson into part of one’s bodily disposition, that is, one’s *habitus*, a set of durable and transposable dispositions shaped by both his/her position in the field and the trajectory of his/her upbringing (Bourdieu, 1984; 1993). For rock musicians, various virtuoso techniques are all different types of embodied cultural capital, that require one to invest significant amount of time and resources to accumulate. To be able to freely manipulate his guitar to perform a 30-second guitar solo containing skills such as shredding or tapping, a beginner needs to start at a very slow speed, and carefully adjust his body posture, learn the solo note-by-note, until he can freely play it at the correct tempo. This process usually involves not only a significant period of time, but also some particular forms of material resources, such as money, equipment, and/or instructional facilities.

The struggles for the dominant position in the field is also, to quote Bourdieu, the

... symbolic struggle for the production of common sense or, more precisely, for a monopoly over legitimate naming, agents put into action the symbolic capital that they have acquired in previous struggles and which can be juridically guaranteed. (Bourdieu, 1990: 135)

The symbolic capital here is, according to Bourdieu, ‘a form which is assumed by different kinds of capital when they are perceived as legitimate’ (ibid.: 128). Such legitimacy can only be attained through the collective misrecognition of the quality of disinterestedness expressed by relevant forms of social action, as they conceal “intensions to maximize a certain kind of profit,” which can be perceived as parallel to the kind of holy actions such as asceticism or the most extreme devotion that appears to be indifference to secular benefits, or any goods that satisfy the personal demand out of selfish desire (Bourdieu, 1998: 85–6). That is to say, only when the kind of social practice is to some extent perceived as that which bears the quality of disinterestedness can it be valorized as useful symbolic capital. Following this reasoning, it can be argued that, while embodied cultural capital is understood as the kinds of ability that requires one to invest time, energy, and material resources, not all

of them are indiscriminately legitimate enough to be effective in the games of position-taking in the field, only those which are valorized as symbolic capital could be at stake.

Here, we can return to the case of Taiwan. As already mentioned, the mode of distinction between rock music and local production of popular music perceived by the young rockers was based on playing techniques, in particular, whether the song contains certain traits of the musical genre type that they listened to, ranging from the use of fuzzy guitars and funk bass, to long guitar solos. Based upon these musical indices, the majority of popular music appeared to them as easy-listening music. It was the lack of playing techniques that made these songs easily accepted by the market, as the arrangement of technical elements in pop songs appeared to be the opposite of the kind of esoteric elements of heavy rock that requires one to spend significant amount of time to learn to play instruments to decode these parts. In contrast to the musical conventions of local pop music production, instrumental virtuosity was attributed with strong legitimacy in the world of instrumentalists because, on the one hand, they were relatively not well accepted by the mass audience, and on the other hand, they could be further justified by rock's easy connection to a few other "high music" genres—such as jazz, fusion, and even classical music. Therefore, in this relational structure, instrumental virtuosity was valorized as the most legitimate kind of symbolic capital in the world of rock instrumentalists.

Here, it is becoming clearer why session musicians in Taiwan could maintain their symbolic status as the authoritative figures in the world of rock instrumentalists, while at the same time musically engage in jobs which were seemingly in contrast to the commonly perceived rock ethos. On the one hand, the aesthetic core of rock in Taiwan in this period was the emphasis on playing techniques, rather than originality. In fact, the local discourse around the western history of rock music's development had even once been reduced to the history of the development of playing techniques, which was a thread beginning with Jimi Hendrix's genius invention of some certain techniques, further developed by figures such as Jimmy Page and Eddie Van Halen, to the late 1980s instrumental virtuosos such as Yngwie Malmsteen, Joe Satriani, and Steve Vai. Under these circumstances, for local rock instrumentalists, session musician were thus not as problematic as they would have been perceived by western rockers due to their lack of autonomy and originality;²⁶ instead, session musicians in

²⁶ See, for example, Frith, 2011.

Taiwan were worshipped and revered as “god-like” figures in each instrumental sphere, due to their symbolic status, which was validated both by their exclusive position and their possession of the most desirable and legitimate kind of capital: instrumental virtuosity. For the majority of local musicians, to be a successful session musician mean not only a guarantee of economic revenue, but also an objective affirmation of their musical competence and thereby the symbolic status as a locally defined instrumentalist hero.

The Formation of a Technically Oriented Learning System

Since the advent of YBB in the late 1980s, the field of high school rock gradually took shape, with the establishment of several rock clubs at different high schools. In both the formation and operation of such a field, musicians (covers musicians and session musicians) who also worked as instrument teachers played significant roles. Almost every school would hire one instrument teacher to teach in its rock or guitar club; many rock clubs were even established with the aid/intervention of the instrumental teachers.²⁷

The relationship between the instrument teachers and the student clubs had significant implications for musicians’ careers, the music-shop business, and students’ learning practice. First, it was a widely seen pattern that teachers would encourage the student club members to take extra courses in the music shop or the studio where the teacher worked. Second, it was also a common practice that the teacher would sell entry-level instruments to the club members from the music shop, which meant that

²⁷ Building close ties with school guitar and rock clubs were the most common business strategy for the staffs of learning institutions (including music shops, personal studios, or musical instrument cram-schools) to maintain their business. It often operates in a commonly seen pattern: after one or several famous teachers from one institution were hired by several schools to be the club teachers, the members of these clubs would then be recruited by these teachers back to the private institution for individual instruction. According to one of my respondents, the owner of one influential music shop in Tainan, in this trade there had been several business conflicts between different music shops which struggled to gain teaching positions in schools, as it was the very necessary step before the success recruitment of groups of students and sales of entry-level instruments.

usually the teacher could take a certain amount of commission from the sales.²⁸ Third, in such a system, the teacher's musical career greatly dictated the way students imagined and pursued their musical career. That is to say, the performance of their teachers in YBB or in the professional world (cover/session) offered concrete avenues for the students to envisage their future musical journey. As Tsai argues in his study on the development of the rock culture in 1990s Taiwan, before the further differentiation of both the mode of musical operation and musical taste, it was very hard for learners to break away from the musical languages learnt from the teachers who were featured in imitation and the cult of instrumental virtuosity (Tsai, 2001). Through such a system of musical reproduction, the cult of instrumental virtuosity was thus transmitted to the emerging field of high school rock, and further became a highly valued category in which students from different schools were struggling for the position of being the best.

The Growing Popularity of Rock and the Rise of Student Clubs

The growing popularity of commercial rock and the establishment of YBB triggered the formation of the high school rock culture. After the mid-1990s, there was a rapid growth in the number of high school rock clubs, which was closely related to the historical intersection of the rise of the indie scene and the growing popularity of rock bands in the mainstream market. In what follows we first look at the social genesis of the rise of original bands and the local indie scene, and their connection to the rapid growth of high school rock clubs as they approached the new century. Although the musical conception of this faction might have not brought significant influence to the way high school students engage in their rock activities, as will be shown below, it somehow contributed to the popularity of rock among the high school youth in an indirect way.

The Rise of Original Bands and the Growing Popularity of Rock after the Mid-1990s

²⁸ The high status of being an officially hired teacher could easily give students confidence in the quality of their purchase.

From 1994 to late in that decade, the rock scene in Taiwan went through a process of transformation and differentiation. Having long been tired of both the obsequious clichéd performance in live pubs and the paradoxical culture of the cult of virtuosic covers, a new generation started to play original songs at several newly formed venues around the cultural district in central Taipei. The emergence of these bands represented not only a collective reaction to the canonical practices of virtuosic covers, but also the differentiation in the existing field with the institutionalization of new sorts of rock practice and aesthetic standards under the umbrella of a new category: *Chuang-Zuo bands* (創作樂團 / Original Bands).

As stated earlier, the social universe of rock music from the 1980s onward was a heteronormous field populated by a hierarchical ladder constituted by performing opportunities in YBC, and the career choices of instrument teacher, covers musician, and session musician. Especially in live pubs, musicians could not even freely arrange their covers repertoires. After the late '80s, around three to four “live houses” were established to offer an “authentic” rock experience. In this circle, most covers bands gathered in two live houses: Wooden Top, and Man, Dog n’ Ant. Although their musical activity was still based on making covers music, it was in this kind of venues that musicians could at least make their own choices of covers. While most live pub bands might be proud of their proficient interpretation of the Eagles’ “Hotel California,” bands in the newly established live houses were competing with each other in terms of the musical tastes expressed through their choices of covers, ranging from heavy metal to punk rock (Tsai, 2001).

At the time, it was only in this kind of venue that original work could be found, although it was very often described by the employers as a “box office disaster” as the performances did not conform to the musical convention dictated by audiences’ expectation (Lo, 2000: 75). In the first place, only a few bands attempted to play their own material, such as Assassin, Groupies, Intuition, and Red Nail Polish. In 1994, right after the closedown of Wooden Top and Man, Dog n’ Ant due to a series of accidents,²⁹ Chang Hsien-Feng, the vocalist of the band Groupies, started to manage a new live house, Scum, which became the only venue for the gathering of rock musicians and fans at that time. At this point, Chang introduced a new venue policy

²⁹ These were, respectively, due to the accidental death of the owner of Wooden Top and a fire accident involving Man, Dog n’ Ant.

that each performing band needed to play at least one original song. This policy successfully facilitated a process of institutional exclusion and reframing, as well as the formation of a faction of original bands—including BackQuarter, Clippers, Dribdas, Ladybug, and Scrap Metal—under the collective label of the “Scum Bands.”

In 1995, two American members, Jimi and Wade, of the band Dribdas organized the Spring Scream festival in southern Taiwan, which attracted around 3,000 audience members. The success of this festival further encouraged other similar kinds of events, such as the Formoz Festival which was first organized by the Northern Inter-University Student Organization of Rock³⁰ in 1996, the Hot Rock Festival which was sponsored by Dr. Martens in 1998, and the Ho-hai-yan Festival sponsored by TCMUISC and the Taipei County government in 2000. On the other hand, as the number of original bands was growing, several original live houses were developed one after another, such as VIBE in 1998, UnderWorld in 1999, and Zeitgeist in 1999.

With the development of these institutional platforms, sending demos gradually turned into a standard procedure for the event organizers to recruit talented performers, with the rise of a series of new musical conventions centered around DIY practice (Jian, 2013)—song-writing, use of recording technologies, and the emphasis on instrumental “tone color.” In such a process, an underground scene fueled by the practice of song-writing gradually emerged, with a corresponding increase in the number of live venues, festivals, indie labels, and original bands (Lin, 2003). In the first year of the Spring Scream, for example, there were only twelve bands in the lineup, among which five or six bands still played Nirvana covers; in 1998, the lineup increased to fifty bands which all played their own works. By 2000, there were 120 bands at the Spring Scream, all playing original songs. Once again, this development conforms to Becker’s emphasis on the importance of the mutual dependence between the shared convention and the supportive network to the existence of a particular type of artistic genre (1982). With the ongoing institutional development of a mutually dependent network, including the establishment of live houses, festivals, and rules for inclusion and exclusion, the practice of song-writing and relevant convention in the indie scene could thus be maintained by the rise of a substantial reward system.

³⁰ It was later corporatized into TRA Music of which Freddy Lim, the lead vocal of currently renowned extreme metal band Chthonic, is the main organizer.

At the same time, the commercial success of a few rock-oriented artists also made domestic mainstream labels more willing to invest in original bands or alternative singer-songwriters (Jian, 2001: 192). The rise of Wubai, Chang Cheng-Yue, and Yang Nai-Wen under the label Magic Stone—a subsidiary label of Rock Record—was the most renowned example of the growing popularity of “band sound” in the mainstream market in this period. The musical works of these artists were marked by the participant of authentic band players (in contrast to the rock albums produced by session musicians in the 1980s). With these new bands’ success, their hit songs became top hits in local karaoke, one of the most popular leisure activities for local youth in the 1990s. Moreover, the guitar tablatures of their hit songs were included into the most popular guitar instruction books, *Essential of Guitar*, *Guitar Handbook* and *Guitar Shop*—the must-read textbooks in the pedagogical sphere of playing acoustic guitar in Taiwan. Under these circumstances, “playing rock music” gradually turned into a dominant form of musical practice among high school students, which triggered a widespread development of rock clubs at different campuses across the island.

The Flourishing Growth of High School Rock Clubs

The development of rock clubs on each campus was closely related to the changes in the field of popular music production. Before the 1980s, the activities of popular music in campus was dictated by *College Song*,³¹ accompanied by the popularity of the “guitar club.” With the development of music shops, live pubs and growing number of rock commodities in the mainstream market, from the 1980s onward, playing in a rock band gradually became a popular activity in guitar clubs. The advent of YBB further facilitated this trend and triggered the development of “rock clubs” in school campuses (Jian, 2001: 152).

The commercial success of original rock music in the mainstream market further facilitated the growing popularity of rock activities among high school students. During the 1990s, several local indie labels operated with close ties to the mainstream labels, to explore profitable talents from the non-mainstream sphere, in which a certain degree of genre diversity had been developed by the works of different artists. This

³¹ See the previous chapter.

included Wubai's blues rock, Jerry Lo's hip-hop tunes, and Jutoupi's Taiwanese rap tunes, and so forth. In particular, the market success of the local blues rocker Wubai in the mid-1990s soon brought about a wave of "band sound" in both mainstream and underground worlds, and, as Jian argues, facilitated the growing trend of "forming bands" among the youth (Jian, 2013: 113). In the high school rock field, many longer established rock clubs, such as the rock clubs of Taipei First Girls' High School and Chingmei Girls' High School, were established at this time.

With Wubai's success, there was growing interest from the major labels to seek profitable talents in the underground scene. Between the mid-1990s and the early 2000s, more and more bands were offered record contracts by major labels, such as Luantan (Warner Music), Mayday (Rock Records), Tolaku (Sony), and Chairman (WHAT'S Music). In 1999, the Mayday band, of which the members were ex-members of the guitar club at the Affiliated High School of National Taiwan Normal University, achieved significant commercial success by selling 300,000 copies of their first album, and more than 10,000 tickets for their debut concert in the mainstream market. On the other side of the story, from 2000 onward, a new indie label entitled Taiwan Colors Music co-organized the Ho-hai-yan festival with the Taipei County government at Fulong Beach. With the atmosphere of "band rush" brought about by the commercial success of Wubai and Mayday, plus the strategy of free tickets and the featuring the beach image, this event soon become one of the most popular festivals in Taiwan. "Going to the Ho-hai-yan together" became one of the most popular summertime student activities.³² At the same time, the musical instrument tuition business reached its peak. Mrs. Lin, owner of the largest musical instrumental school, recalls the drastic change in the market at this period of time:

Since Mayday became famous, rock music seemed to be more valued in Taiwanese society. Local governments were rushing into organizing music festivals, [and] our instrument teachers thus had more performing opportunities. This influenced a lot of people, because there were more and more musical events.

³² According to the official statistic, in 2000 the number of audience members were 8000; in 2001, the figure approached 25,000. In 2003, this festival attracted more than 100,000 people (J. Cheng, 2006: 49). In my fieldwork, 'attending Ho-hai-yan' was included by the majority of rock clubs in different high schools as one official club event.

Apart from Ho-hai-yan, there were other festivals in Taitung, in Taichung, and in any other regions. It was in that period of time many student clubs were established, the number of our students also increased. Especially after the rise of Mayday, a lot of high school students were attracted to play rock music, which made our business particularly good at the time.

Between the mid-1990s and the early 2000s, with the rise of Wubai, Mayday, and the growing popularity of musical festivals, original rock music gradually became a significant sub-genre in the territory of pop music in Taiwan. With the widespread development of high school rock clubs, rock music gradually permeated high school campuses and turned into one of the most popular forms of youth subculture. In greater Taipei, in 1994, while there were 25 public high schools in total, only 5 of them had established rock clubs in campuses. In 2001, however, while the number of public high schools rose to 47, 33 of them had established rock clubs. That is to say, the percentage of the high schools with rock club had risen from 20 percent to 70 percent within this period. In schools without rock clubs, playing in a rock band was also the dominant form of musical activity in the guitar clubs while folk songs became the secondary option for students. It was through these developments that rock music gradually penetrated deep into students' everyday life. Since then, school rock clubs (along with music shops) constitute the basic unit of the formation of rock communities in Taiwan, and have turned into what members of Mayday call "the birthplace of student bands." "To join the rock club when studying in a high school" became an equivalent to the very first access to rock for Taiwanese youth after the 2000s.

The Dominant Status of Professional Musicianship in the Teaching/Learning System

The spread of high school rock culture was closely related to the rise of original rock music after the mid-1990s. However, there had been an obvious gap in the patterns of musical operation between the high school rock scene and the indie scene. In the high school rock scene, there had barely been substantial attempt in song-writing. Many rock hits from the 1980s were still elevated by students as "must-cover" songs,

accompanied by the collective pursuit of instrumental virtuosity. To some extent, this was partly relevant to the problems in the market of musical instrument tuition. Particularly for students learning from technique-oriented teachers, their learning practice would easily be guided towards a trajectory which was more difficult for one to initiate song-writing. The head of one famous music shop in Taichung City, Mr. W, was the best example of this. As he argues, regarding his pedagogical ideas:

Some indie bands have their own artistic idea in their songs, which might not be easily evaluated. But at the end of the day, it still involves playing instruments, then we will carefully scrutinize this part, to see if the player sticks tightly with the precise beat, the grooving, or if the player add something [that is] in conflict with music theory. If I were to teach, personally I think one needs to be technically competent enough first. I would always tell my students the need to study the music from the 1980s, the music from the 1970s and the 1980s were the best; many playing techniques developed in the 1970s contributed to the excellence of the song-writing in the 1980s ... There was one time I introduced Guns N' Roses' "Don't Cry" to a student of mine, he found it very noisy in the first place, but god knows many years later he won the best guitarist in a Yamaha Band Battle. In contrast, I've seen an introduction pamphlet of a band, I don't want to say which one, which I found very ridiculous. They said that they originally wanted to make covers of "Don't Cry" and "Hotel California," but they were not technically competent enough to make it, so they started to write their own songs instead. In my opinion, even though they can write their own songs, they still lack the very basic skills.

Up to the point when I started my fieldwork, this mode of musical operation was still popular in the market of musical instrument tuition. The aforementioned music shop, for example, was one of the institutions of instrumental tuition which covered the widest range of school clubs in Taichung City. In KCRC, the senior guitarists would strongly recommend their junior members to learn from three teachers known for their impressive technical proficiency.

Of course, this does not mean that indie musicians were not influential in the teaching market. With the rise of the indie scene and the original bands, there were

also increasing numbers of teaching staff members featured in indie music and song-writing. In 1996, for example, a new institution of instrumental tuition, the APA studio, was established to offer an indie-oriented teaching style and had become influential in the student market. However, even though more and more high school students were learning from indie musicians, many of them still tended to focus on making virtuosic covers in their daily musical practice in high school rock clubs. As already mentioned in Chapter 2, ultimately students need to obey the guidance of their senior members despite what they have learned from private teachers. What is more, in such a field, where elite students tend to devote more time and energy in their club activities, their pursuit of instrumental virtuosity was closely related to their collectively shared sense of honor and school identity. Obviously, these cannot be properly explained by merely the operation of private instrumental tuition. Here, we need to look at what was happening in the schooling context. In the next chapter, I will turn our focus to the case of this study, the rock club of KC high school. The thesis will demonstrate how rock music was brought into schools to become a subcultural toolkit for students to resist educational control and secure subcultural distinction, and how these facilitated the elevated status of instrumental virtuosity and heavy metal in the field of high school rock.

Part III

Ethnography and analysis

Chapter 6

The School, the Exam, and Rock: The Structural Condition of Youth Rock Culture in Taiwan

In the previous chapter, I illustrated the social genesis of the cult of instrumental virtuosity in the field of popular music production in Taiwan, and how it became the pedagogical principal in the learning institution of rock along with the rise of the high school rock clubs. In this chapter, we can start looking at the major case of this study, KC High School Rock Club (KCRC).

By looking at the institutional setting in which members of KCRC engage in their rock activity, I intend this chapter to delineate the social mechanism that facilitates students' acquisition of valued playing techniques. Apart from the members of KCRC, the musical experience of students from other schools—both elite high schools and non-elite high schools—are included for a comparative insight. Through comparing the experiences of students in different schools, a much more detailed picture of the structural condition in the field of high school rock is obtained. In such fields, as can be seen below, a certain degree of school success has ironically been a very significant precondition for local youth to develop their rock activity.

The chapter starts with the question: what makes students of the elite high schools like KC High School technically superior in the field of high school rock? In detail, after briefly introducing the socio-historical background of KCRC, I will first illustrate the quality of the acquisition of instrumental virtuosity in the field of high school rock, and how such quality is advantageous to students of KCRC and other elite high schools. In the later part, I further compare the experiences of the non-elite high schools' students to the elite schools' students, to argue how different "exam results" have become the starting point for the inequality in the sphere of club activities in high school education in Taiwan, hence the differences in the performance of rock activities between schools of different academic rank.

KC High School Rock Club: A Brief Background

KC High School

KC High School (KC) has long been one of the best high schools in Taiwan. Its rock club, namely KC High School Rock Club (KCRC), is the oldest rock music student club at the level of high school education on the island. Located in the city center of Taipei, KC was founded in 1898, and was originally a secondary school exclusively for Japanese students under Japanese colonial policy. By 1919, KC had started to recruit Taiwanese students under a new policy named “*Ri-Tai Gong Shiue*”. As part of the colonial assimilation policy, this arrangement allowed talented Taiwanese students to access higher levels of education which were previously reserved for Japanese students.

During the Japanese colonial era, KC was one of the most prestigious boys’ secondary schools. Together with GC, it was recognized as one of the two best male high schools in Taipei, while FTG and SZ high schools were the two best girls’ institutes in the same period. In the 1950s, the Nationalist government established several new public high schools and introduced the Joint Public Senior High School Entrance Exam (JPSHS, see Chapter 3) to centralize student recruitment. Under the framework of the JPSHS, KC high school has long been in the top three boys’ high schools along with GC and NUHS high school. These three schools, along with the top three girls’ high schools—FTG, SZ, and CM—are widely known as “the Six” in Taipei.

KC school has not only been the high school with the most outstanding records in their graduates’ entry to elite universities, it is also renowned for its campus atmosphere, which is marked by a high level of student autonomy as well as a wide range of students’ club activities. The school allows its students more leeway than students from lower-ranked schools in arranging their own curriculum schedule. In particular, this school is famous for students frequently “cutting class,”³³ while not incurring serious sanction for doing so. It is believed that the school authorities tend to take a tolerant attitude towards truancy, entrusting students to be responsible for their own exam preparation—the major concern of the majority of school authorities

³³ See, for example, TVBS (2009) *Buying Lunch, Showing Off: If You Don’t Climb the Fence, then You Are Not a True KC Student*. *TVBS News* Retrieved from <http://news.tvbs.com.tw/old-news.html?nid=132419>.

in Taiwan. KC also has the most variety in the types of student clubs on offer in Taiwan. The collective enthusiasm of KC's students in club activities can be exemplified by a famous campus saying: "if you are not in a club, then you are not a true KC student."



Figure 6.1 "Fence-climbing" in KC High School

KC Rock Club: A Top Model in the Field of High School Rock in Taiwan

KC Rock Club had once been the rock division of the guitar club, which was developed in the folk era during the 1970s (see Chapter 4). In 1987, due to musical differences and conflicts in sharing club resources between the two divisions, the rock division was differentiated from the guitar club and became independent (Interviewing data). The early history of KCRC was closely intertwined with the development of rock music in Taiwan during the 1990s. As already mentioned, since the development of the field of high school rock in the late 1980s, high school clubs have become the most significant sites for the emergence of new talent in rock music. As the earliest entrant in the field of high school rock, many ex-members of KCRC later became prominent figures in Taiwan's indie scene, or became professional musicians.

As the oldest student organization of rock activity in the high school circle, KCRC's long history has produced a more solid organization and rich resources in terms of both instrumental instruction and material equipment—club space, musical instruments, tutors, and so forth. For a long time, KCRC has been recognized as one of the best rock clubs, while their gigs have earned the reputation of "grand events" in the field of high school rock. Not only are the members of KCRC proud of their

preeminence, due to the club's leading status and long history, but attendance at their musical events is generally recognized as a "must" by other schools' members. As Mr. Jieh, one of the leaders of the rock club of BQ high school (ranked between fifth and tenth in the Greater Taipei region), mentioned when interviewed: "When we were junior members right after we joined the club, the first thing our senior members demanded was to order all of us to attend the welcome gig of KCRC, they told us that it was a classic event in the circle of high school rock."



Figure 6.2 KCRC's rehearsal room



Figure 6.3 Students practicing in the hallway outside the rehearsal room

In addition, KCRC's organizational form has often been seen as the model for the management of a rock club. Li Xiaozu, who is also one of the top young session musicians in the field of popular music production in Taiwan, recalls how he endeavored to copy the organization of KCRC when he was the leader of the CC rock club in its early years:

Compared to KCRC, our club was very young when I was the leader. They had already established some traditions for the successors to follow, but in our club I was the one who wanted to establish some traditions which we did not yet have. It can't be denied that if we wanted to run a club properly, we would need a solid institution. Like in KCRC, the way they arrange instrument instruction, such as "who and how to teach," and the arrangement of winter and summer vacation training, these are all significant institutional arrangements. Many sorts of things like the time schedule of club lessons, how to evaluate suitable candidates for future leaders, things like these are the institutions of an organization. But we did not have that yet in my time and I tried very hard to learn from KCRC to establish our own.

KCRC's distinctive feature is its members' technical superiority in playing instruments. As mentioned in the previous chapter, playing technique is the most valued musical dimension in the field of high school rock in Taiwan. Since establishment, KCRC has earned a reputation in that its members' technical competence in making covers would usually be nearly a year ahead of the members of other schools' rock clubs. That is to say, usually by the end of each semester year, the junior members of KCRC (first-year grade students) would be able to demonstrate a level of musical skills similar to (or even better than) the senior members (second-year grade students) of other schools. For example, in most schools some classic works of Bon Jovi ("Living On a Prayer," "You Give Love a Bad Name") or the Eagles ("Hotel California") might be the songs that would challenge the skills of senior members who had already been playing for two years; however, most junior members of KCRC could have already been able to play these songs fluently, while senior members would pursue higher-level technical achievements by playing songs containing the most virtuoso elements such as the works of Dream Theater or instrumental songs (the most common cases being songs by Steve Vai, Joe Satriani, and Yngwie Malmsteen).

Another technical feature of KCRC is their emphasis on bass. The historical development of rock music has to a large degree been "guitar-centric," and apart from the lead vocal, guitarists have long been the focus of on-stage attention. In Taiwanese high school rock, this is reflected in one recurring situation: while guitar has long been

the most popular instrument of choice for the new recruits to each rock club, bass has never been a popular choice, as it is usually perceived by beginners as an instrument with low stage presence. In her studies on the female rockers' band experience in Taiwan, Yang (2005) finds that among her interviewees, bass is the most common instrument option for female rockers, apart from vocals, whereas guitar is the less popular one. As she contends, the cultural image of rock guitar has long been constructed as a macho one, marked by the emphasis on male control and virtuosity—the typical model of what Simon Frith calls “cock rock” (Frith, 1978) that contains a series of codes marked by male sexual performance which are unfamiliar to the cultural cultivation in most girls' upbringing. Unlike guitar, the technical requirements for playing the bass in a band can be as low as just playing the root of the chord; its low-key characteristic on stage also makes this instrument more apt to girls' preference. In KCRC, however, under the atmosphere of absolute emphasis on playing skill, pursuing bass virtuosity has also been at the core of the learning practice for this instrument in the club. This has long been reflected on their preference in playing covers of the funk rock band Red Hot Chilli Peppers, as their bassist Flea has been one of the most widely recognized bass virtuosos in the history of rock; many of his classic bass riffs and solos are marked by the rich deployment of shredding and bass slapping, which are the very “textbook materials” for pursuing bass virtuosity. In addition, the instrumental tunes of Marcus Miller and Victor Wooten, which feature virtuosic bass solo performance, are also a favorite of KCRC bassists. In the nationwide high school rock battle (which will be discussed later), KCRC has won the Best Bassist Prize for eight consecutive years from the academic year 2005–06 to 2012–13 (the competition was first established in 2003). Through bass virtuosity, KCRC members can prove that their organization is a club of genuine virtuosos; that is, even in the sphere of bass playing, their members can still claim their technical superiority. As one of the leaders, Yu Hung-Chen, describes their club:

The bassists of KCRC have always been able to take the award of best bassist in the high school battle year after year. When anyone in the circle [of high school rock] comments on KCRC, it always involves statements such as “strong techniques,” “being awesome,” and being “far beyond the high school standard.” In a word, all of the instruments in our club are technically far beyond the high

school standard, and bass is particularly our signature instrument. I think this is why our welcome gig can always make the venue be packed with thousands of audience members.

The Structural Advantage of Students of Elite High Schools

Instrumental Virtuosity in the Field of High School Rock in Taiwan

In the field of high school rock, instrumental excellence is attained by making faithful covers of songs which display the skills widely recognized as the most musically adept: shredding, sweeping, and tapping in guitar playing, shredding and slapping in bass playing, and blast beat in playing drums. In 1990s Taiwan, many classic tunes of '80s and '90s heavy metal bands, such as songs by Bon Jovi, Metallica, Halloween, X Japan, Mr. Big or Guns N' Roses, were the major musical source for musicians acquiring these skills.

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, virtuoso skill can be seen as a form of embodied cultural capital that one needs to invest significant amounts of time and resources to acquire. Particularly for high-speed songs with “shredding” elements, learning to play them requires one to be able to “decode,” to borrow Bourdieu’s term (Bourdieu, 1968), the composition, that is, to be able to recognize each individual musical note in the melody, and then to represent similar series of notes through the collaboration between one’s own body parts and the instrument at the same speed. This involves not only the ability to decode the notes by ear, but also the physical coordination performed through the use of the player’s hand and other parts of the body—particularly in terms of whether the player can dexterously use their fingers to speak the musical sentence composed of abundant notes through the instrument in a certain interval of time. For any beginner, who has just learnt some basic abilities in playing backing music, to become an instrumentalist expert who can freely manipulate the solo-oriented high-speed performance, they must go through a process that begins from the speed at which they can play each single note of the melody clearly, through disciplining their body action by using metronome clicks, avoiding creating any unintended noise, and then gradually accelerating to the original performance speed.

This particular mode of musical operation, despite some nuance in different types of practicing, is marked by its solo-oriented, showy nature. Its aesthetic principal is based on the individual performance of the player via outstanding solo performance, in clear contrast to the backing position in the context of musical collaboration. In particular, as students' musical practice is mainly based on playing outstanding covers, the acquisition of the relevant ability relies more on mechanical practicing and intense memorization, which require one to invest a significant amount of time and energy on repetitive practicing.

Established Academic Status as the Precondition for the Engagement of Rock Activity

The free time, or to put it more precisely, *leisure*, which can be freely appropriated by students is the key to acquiring instrumental virtuosity. In this regard, members of KCRC can be said to be in the position of structural advantage in accumulating the valued cultural capital, that is, to invest significant amounts of time to learn virtuosic skills by making covers. In general, the students in elite high schools in Taiwan usually enjoy more leeway and time in engaging in leisure activities. Compared to other students, their "academic status" usually means that their parents and school authorities are more willing to take a more tolerant and open-minded attitude towards some seemingly "non-productive" activities, which, of course, includes the musical activities in the world of rock clubs.

In particular, the school authorities of elite high schools are relatively more willing to allow leeway for students to engage in "less important" areas and subjects, due to the higher promotion rate of students admitted into (famous) universities than the majority of lower-ranked schools; the latter often face much more pressure, particularly pressure from the parents, in terms of their students' performance in university entrance exams. The social studies teacher of KC high school, Mrs. C, illustrates that the question of why students of elite high schools can enjoy more leeway in conducting club activities actually has the same answer to the question of why the teachers of "less important subjects" in elite high schools normally earn more respect than the teachers of the same subjects in non-elite schools:

It is very obvious that elite high school students can normally spend more time in engaging in club activities. To some degree, it is because they share a particular sense of honor, the honor of being a student who carries the responsibility of upholding the school's reputation and superiority, so that they would be more willing to spend significant amounts of time in club activities. Apart from this, however, it is also relevant to the particular institutions which reflect the larger environmental condition in which the school is situated. It can be put in this way: compared to the majority of other schools, the elite high schools are marked by more normalized pedagogical principles. That is to say, the elite high schools would not treat the main subjects, I mean the subjects which are particularly relevant to university exams such as Math or English, as the only subjects that matter. This is what other schools would usually do, as they have an urgent need to catch up with schools like ours. But, of course, what makes all of this possible is that there has already been a strong guarantee of students' performance in university entrance exams, so that students have more leeway to develop their abilities in non-main subject areas, including music, art, social studies, and club activities as well.

In his study of the learning practices of Taiwanese elite students, Yeh Shu-Hung argues Taiwan's high school recruitment program is in fact a mechanism of large-scale ability grouping. Students with outstanding exam results are grouped in elite high schools, whereas those with inferior results are grouped in mediocre community-based high schools. Therefore, students of elite high schools are those with better exam results and better studying habits. Under these circumstances, teachers and school authorities of elite high schools in Taiwan generally can tolerate the students' self-management of their school life, because what is at stake in Taiwan's high school educational system is only the final university entrance exams in the last year (Yeh, 2015: 58).

The Subjective Precondition: Future Expectation and Studying Habitus

The outstanding performance of graduates' entry to elite universities also provides current students with legitimate excuses to focus on playing in the first and the second

year of studies. In his study on the social background of Taiwan's most prestigious university, National Taiwan University (NTU), Lo Ming-Ching reveals that from 1982 to 2000, the graduates of "the Six" schools in Taipei have accounted for more than 50 percent of NTU students (Lo, 2002: 127–9). In KC high school, nearly 40 percent of graduates successfully gain entry to the NTU every year. In KCRC, every year less than 5 percent of the graduates only reach the entry to local private universities (the secondary option to national universities), while the majority of KCRC graduates have gained entry to the five most elite universities in Taiwan. For current students, many of their predecessors have proven that "the first and second years for club activities, the third year for the revision for the university entrance exam" can be a useful formula for a successful high school life. That is, to achieve something significant in the world of club activities while also gaining admission to an elite university, students are thus encouraged to reproduce a similar schooling pattern and are much more intensively involved in their rock activities than students from other schools, even when facing some "provisional failure" in their school performance. As KCRC member Wang Jen-Kuan mentions:

It happens not only in our club. In fact it's a very common myth in the KC high school that we can still be successful in the university entrance exam in the last year even after two years of intensive involvement in club activities. In our club, it is a very common type of thinking like "look, three of our graduates gained entry to the Department of Electrical Engineering at NTU."³⁴ Then each one of us would expect "yeah, next year I will be the one who gains entry to the same department, I must be able to make huge progress in the last year as our seniors did." With this sort of thinking, then most of us would dare to do something that makes us look cool, like constantly bunking off or ignoring school tests to practice instruments.

In the objective sense, such a "myth" is not groundless. As Yeh argues in his study on Taiwanese elite students, these students are studying in the schools which require top

³⁴ This department has long been the first priority for science students and only recruits the top 150 students from the science group in Taiwan every year.

exam results for entry, the students' accumulated competence in taking exams—in a word, the *studying habitus* of elite students—allows them to be much more aware of their academic situation. They are very conscious of the gap between their current ability and the standard they will need to attain excellent exam results to meet the elite universities' entry requirements, and hence how much time they can afford to devote to instrument practice without sacrificing academic performance. The more sophisticated set of study strategies which these students have developed include the use of “cram” schools, and how to arrange revision schedules and strengthen weak subject knowledge; these strategies allow students to free up time for playing (Yeh, 2015). This explains why, compared to other students, the elite students have more forms of capital to resist the regulations from their schools and families. Jiajung Tsai, a former member of the TFG (one of the best girls' high schools in Taipei) rock club, recalls why she and her club counterparts dared to spend most of her first two years of study playing rock music:

Tsai: Of course there would always be a few members who could manage both daily academic performance and club activities very well. They did attach great importance to their academic performance throughout the year, and not just the result of the final exam. But for the members of my year, at least half of our members thought that there would still be enough time to prepare for the university entrance exam in the third year and thus risk spending so much time in the club activities.

Wang: What frame of mind do you think underpins this confidence?

Tsai: Mostly it was just a kind of passion, like, fuck it, just let's see how it goes. Actually it was kinda like self-deception.

Wang: So you were clearly aware that this is a kind of self-deception?

Tsai: For me, I didn't care too much about that. I knew I wanted to study interior design for my university degree. There are not that many courses for this in the universities in Taiwan; at the worst, I could study at Shichien University. Although it's lower ranked, and I think I could easily be admitted without studying very hard, their interior design course is very famous.

Shichien University in Taiwan is a famous private university which specialized in aspects of design. As the university does not specialize in traditionally academic subjects, the exam requirement for entry is usually not as “super high” as for popular subjects in traditional elite universities, which only the top 5 percent of candidates can attain. However, to gain entry to Shichien, one still needs exam results equivalent to the entry requirements of good national universities (approximately the top 10 percent of all candidates). In a regular high school, only those who are ranked between the top fifth and tenth can reach this kind of subject choice or other subjects of the same level. However, in an elite high school, it would become the choice for the lower-ranked students in a class. To put it another way, while this choice would usually be a much desirable one for regular high school students, an elite high school student would treat such a choice as merely acceptable, or even a “worst case” scenario. For example, Li Wei-I, former leader of the rock club at New Taipei Sanchong high school, gained entry to the Department of Advertising at Fu-Jien University through an exam result equivalent to the minimum requirement of the aforementioned Department of Interior Design at Shichien University. In contrast to Tsai’s disdainful attitude, such result seems a wonderful accomplishment for him:

I did not do very well in my school performance during the first and the second year. However, in the last year I studied very hard, and I finally earned myself a place in my current department, the result of my entrance exam was in the top 5 in my class.

In general, the exam capital of students at non-elite schools is not as high as that of elite high schools such as KC high school. So, when preparing for exams, they are usually not very aware of their academic situation, of the gap between their current ability and the minimum requirements of the ideal university, or what effective strategies to take in revision. The former leader of the rock club of Taipei Municipal Da-Tong High School, Jim Hou, recalls his lack of confidence when he was revising for the university entrance exam in his last year of high school, as compared to a former leader of KCRC:

After our annual gig finished, I went to a cram school, as many third-year students did. One of the leaders of KCRC also went to the same cram school, so we used to sit together. I was quite nervous about the revision, and sometimes I would consult him about ways to revise. One time, I remember, I asked him about ways to prepare for the exam, and asked him if he ever felt anxious. Then he just replied to me, “Don’t worry too much, just to follow your revision schedule as passionately as you play the drums.”

The Predicament of Non-Elite High School Students

From the moment the students of non-elite high schools enter high school, they are expected to use most of their time (throughout three years of study) filling the academic gap between them and the elite high school students. Their club activities are generally restricted by both the school and their parents. At a material level, while in the elite high school, office space for any club is usually a “given right” for students, in the community-based high schools, it is still the case for students to need to struggle against the school authorities to gain accommodation for their common hobby. Therefore, these students usually need to spend extra time and money to hire private rehearsal rooms from music shops. The leader of the rock club of Danfeng high school, Ho, grumbled about how frustrated they were by the school authority’s endless rejection of their applications for a club office and funding for their musical activities:

Wang: I heard from the graduates of your club that the head of the school has long been hostile to your club, for instance, directly telling your parents to discourage you from joining the rock club?

Ho: What he cares about is the university promotion rate, league tables, and exam results. There is rarely room for us to do something more. Like the school party, it makes us feel that the school authority just brushed it off and is creating a kind of atmosphere that the exam is the only thing that we need to focus on. They’ve just kept suppressing us from spending more time in our club activities.

Wang: How have they interfered?

Ho: The first one is the club fund. They've never permitted our application. But, for example, the kind of seemingly "good clubs," like the reading club, what they do is to go to the elementary schools in remote areas to encourage the kids to read and learn; the school authority thinks this kind of club makes our school look positive to society, so they have invested a lot in this club. I mean these clubs are always successful in getting a lot of funding from our school, and they are given a big classroom to use. Our funding application has never been successful, and so far we still have no space to practice. So we basically just use a private music shop as our base; it's about 30 minutes by bus away from our school, and we need to pay for using that space.

Wang: Have you ever tried to fight for it?

Ho: Yes, we did. In fact, there was an art classroom which we used to use for instrument lessons. We tidied up the space, but the school then just told us that the classroom is managed by the art teacher, and that he needed to use it.

Wang: Is there any other disused space in your school?

Ho: Yes, we've mentioned suggested spaces to the school so many times. They just keep saying that they are all in use, but at the same time the Reading Club is allowed to use the massive space.

Wang: How many clubs are there in your high school?

Ho: Between 10 to 20, and the guitar club has always had many more members than the others, they are looked upon more positively than us by most people, so they get less interference. And the rock club is noisier to most people and is thus less welcomed.

Wang: Does guitar club have their club space?

Ho: No, they also have no space. Apart from the Reading Club, the Astronomy Club also has their own space, and Biological Research Club. Basically, only academically oriented clubs can have their own space; in our school, there is a clear hierarchy between different kind of hobbies.

In some schools, the school authority would even take to direct interference such as, for example, telling students that they are not allowed to practice in the private music shop together before mid-term and final-term exams, and threatening that otherwise their club will be shut (Interviewing data), as well as directly rejecting any application

for public performance. Under these circumstances, the rock activities in elite high schools and non-elite high schools are strikingly different. In KCRC, for example, there are club lessons on different instruments on every weekday, students can freely use their club office, which is properly equipped with soundproofing and the required amps, drum sets, and mixers, both during the after-school hours from Monday to Friday, and all day on the weekends. Also, many members are supported by their parents, who spend extra money for private music tuition. In the non-elite high schools, students face a serious lack of material support or continuous interference from the school and parents, or even both; hence there is a much higher cost and risk in engaging in club activities.

The Advantages of A Longer History

In the historical process of the development of the field of high school rock, elite high schools' rock clubs were generally established much earlier than those in the non-elite high schools, due to both the longer school history and the much friendlier attitude to non-academic activities on campus. With the aforementioned structural advantage, elite high school students enjoy much more time and leeway in accumulating instrument virtuosity and they therefore take the dominant position in the field of high school rock. From the first moment when the field of high school rock was formed, the playing techniques of students of the top three boys' elite high schools have been commonly recognized as the best among all the high school students. The competition in playing techniques amongst them has been the focus of attention which has defined the legitimate mode of musical operation in the field of high school rock since the 1990s. In particular, it is mainly conducted through making covers of songs containing the most demanding musical elements: schools would compare with each other in terms of "whose choices of covers are more difficult." As Mr .L, the former leader of the rock club at PY High School, recalls:

It was near the end of first semester in the academic year 1998–1999, the guitar club of GC High School had their term gig at the auditorium hall of Taipei Municipal Library. Before the gig started, I heard members of KCRC told me that

in this event, members of GC guitar club will play Halloween's "I Want Out." They said this song is the most expected cover in the whole event and I think because it was the most virtuosic cover at that point of time, the blast beat of the drummer, the shredding guitar and bass. Throughout the whole event, almost every serious player was just waiting for that song, to seriously check the quality of their cover, to see if they made any small mistake. A few months later, some members of KCRC played a cover of Ozzy Osbourne's "Mr. Crowley." Yeah, they totally defeated GC guitar club and other schools, Randy Rhoads, you know, his shredding guitar was just too damn hard and far out of the reach of high school students in my time.

Ever since the twelfth leader of KCRC demonstrated his virtuosic cover of Steve Vai's classic instrumental work "For the Love of God"—which, according to one local famous guitarist Pan Shuegun, was once considered as one of the most difficult covers (such that fewer than three Taiwanese professional guitarists could successfully make a faithful cover of it during the 1990s), this club has been recognized as the leading club in the field of high school rock. From then on, making covers of instrumental virtuosos—such as tunes of Steve Vai, Joe Satriani, Yngwie Malmsteen, Victor Wooten, and Marcus Miller, and so on—has become an honorable tradition in the annual gig, which marks musicians' technical excellence. From the late 1990s onward, the musical event of the elite high schools is always held in packed venues. Like HSNU's famous Guitar Night, or KCRC's welcome gig, these events always attract more than a thousand audience members from year to year and have long been revered as grand high school rock events. The owner of one famous music shop, Mr. Wei of Fuzzy State, clearly describes this discrepancy between the rock clubs of elite high schools and those of non-elite high schools, based on his long experience in the business of rock instruction lessons:

The performance of elite high schools can always attract audiences from lower-ranked schools; however, they seldom attend gigs organized by the latter. This is partly because elite high school students tend to choose more difficult songs, and are willing to spend more time in practicing, and their clubs have a longer history and their musical activities are better institutionalized. So, the students from the

lower-ranked schools would want to learn from them, to see what makes them so good at both studying and playing rock instruments. So, in the trade of musical instrument lessons, rock clubs of elite high schools are usually the primary target for our business. Because everybody knows that the students of lower-ranked schools would want to learn from them, they want to know what kind of equipment do they use, what kind of songs do they play, and where do they learn to play instruments.

While the competition over playing techniques among elite high schools has dictated the legitimate aim to pursue in the field of high school rock, watching the performance of the elite high school groups has also become a necessary procedure for the student musicians of other schools when pursuing technical excellence, even up to the present day. The elite high school musicians have long been the technical leaders in the high school world of rock instrumentalists, and have set the gold standard in both the management of club activities and the legitimate pattern of musical practice. In particular, once the elite high school members present a virtuoso cover at one of their gigs, then members of other schools will then make similar covers at their own gigs, as a gesture to show that they can be as good as elite high school students; this, ironically, once again acknowledges the superior status of the elite high school rock clubs and thereby facilitates the reproduction of the hierarchy in the field.

A Different Model of Youth Subculture in the Exam-Oriented Educational System: All Starts from within the School

In contemporary youth culture, rock music is usually portrayed as a rebellious cultural form, distant from a more mundane lifestyle pattern, and often accompanies a strong sense of antagonism towards the parents' culture and the schooling system. This is generally echoed with some cases, as presented in the relevant literatures of popular music studies (Bennet, 2000; Cohen, 1991; Fornäs et al., 1995), of young rock musicians' tendency to distance themselves from these mundane aspects in their social life via playing and producing rock music. Youth rock culture in Taiwan, however, apparently presents a very different case in stark contrast to these classic descriptions

of tensions between young people, social institutions, and cultural forms. As the case of KCRC shows, academic school ranking can even be relevant to students' involvement and performance in rock activities.

Based upon the former analysis, it would not be an exaggeration to argue here that, in Taiwan, school success has ironically been a very significant precondition for local youth to develop rock activity. One distinctive mechanism that lays the ground for such a difference is the specific institution in the entry to the next level of education in Taiwan. In the West, high school is a part of compulsory education. With the exception of upper-class families who might send their children to boarding school far away from their home region, the most common pattern of enrollment is to study at the community-based school near the student's family. In Taiwan, however, due to the nature of the ability grouping in the centralized high school enrollment via the implementation of the joint exam, students are placed in different high schools delineated by a clear hierarchy according to their exam results. Such an institutional arrangement has long caused a notorious phenomenon which is very much relevant to the pattern of the formation of youth culture in Taiwan during the post-martial law era, that is, the long-standing prevalence of long-distance study at an early age. Especially in the cities where most public elite high schools are found, it has long been a common phenomenon that many students actually come from areas which require that the students commute long distances by public transportation. Furthermore, due to the intensive competition for entry to the better high schools and universities, teenagers aged between 12 to 18 in Taiwan are generally under much more pressure than their western counterparts. For example, while western pupils of the same age can finish their school course at around 3 o'clock and develop their hobbies in the non-academic spheres, Taiwanese students need to be at school from 7:30 in the morning to 5 at night, and are facing pressure from their parents to use their after-school hours "constructively." (Normally students are expected to either go home and study, or go to the cram schools.) Therefore, since the flourishing of various forms of student clubs in the 1990s, these semi-official student organizations have started to become shelters for students to escape from such pressure as it provides an excellently legitimate excuse for students—"staying at school during the after-school hours"—which sounds much more legitimate than other excuses for whatever reason in the eyes of their parents.

It is under this circumstance that high school campuses have become one of the most significant sites for the development of various forms of youth culture. This can be best exemplified through a significant contrast: while the development of specific rock culture in the West can be specified through regional specificities and local-based social setting (Cohen, 1999; Bennett, 2004), such as the Manchester sound (Brown et al., 2000; Crossley, 2009) and the Bristol sound in the UK (Tacchi, 2000), or grunge in Seattle (Bell, 1998), etc., the development of rock culture in Taiwan can be mainly specified by school background. That is to say, many famous rock bands in Taiwan are more marked by their school origin than by geographical origin: for examples, members of Mayday, Sodagreen, and Go Chic are from the guitar club of HSNU; members of 1976, Cosmos People, and the White Eyes are from the rock club of KC high school, while members of 831 from the GC rock club, etc. Apart from their affiliation to certain educational institutions, these bands also share another significant common trait, that is, all the mentioned schools are the most prestigious educational institutions in Taiwan. These schools, in the field of high school rock, have long dominated the symbolic power in defining the legitimate way to engage in rock activities.

As the former analysis shows, this is not because students at these schools are particularly talented or musically gifted. Their strong dedication to rock activities reflects the result of the compromise between students and their parents, teachers, and school authorities. On the one hand, the school's already accumulated historical accomplishment, as manifested in their graduates' entry to the elite universities alleviates the pressure of the school authority and teachers for enhancing their students' performance in the university entrance exam, and students are thus more encouraged to develop their abilities in non-essential subjects. On the other hand, the parents are generally relieved and tend to give their children more leeway as they have already earned a place in an elite high school which is to some extent a guarantee to future success based on past experience (as supported by statistical evidence). In brief, this is exactly a situation that strongly conforms to a common saying in the local practice of parental education: "once you successfully earn a place in an elite school, then you will be free from any more parental interference."

Chapter 7

Rock, Metal, and the Subcultural Distinction of Elite Students

In western society, “resistance” can be said to be the most commonly presented aspect of the everyday culture of rock music, which can be ideologically traced back to the relatively rebellious dimensions originating from the historical contingency of the countercultural movement in the US during the 1960s, or from a “bohemian way of life” that “has been central to British rock” (Frith, 1981: 266–7) from that time. This is not to say that rock is by its very nature rebellious. In fact, if we review the history of popular music, we can see how rock can be complicit with the capitalist mode of music production and commodification. But what cannot be denied is that, in many social contexts or situations involving either the production or consumption of rock, the myth of rock music’s rebellious nature has long been a powerful and persuasive cultural resource that is constantly at play behind either purely commercial promotion or daily politics (Hebdige, 1979; Thornton, 1995). It might be difficult to imagine how rock could become an iconic cultural phenomenon to display the superior status of students wearing the uniform of Eton College. However, this is exactly what happens in the context of Taiwanese education: rock has become a significant cultural form for Taiwanese elite students not only to articulate their symbolic resistance against educational control, but also to display their cultural distinction against non-elite peers.

The previous chapter has illustrated the institutional and structural conditions that contribute to this phenomenon. In this chapter, I turn our focus to the socio-cultural meaning of rock to students in elite high schools. The conceptualization of subcultural resistance and cultural distinction are two main theoretical threads in this chapter. The conception of “subculture” is used at two levels of analysis. First, I demonstrate how several features make rock activity a distinctive subculture which allows KCRC members to be distinguished from other youth leisure groups in Taiwan’s educational context. Second, I show how their dedication to rock activity is embedded in a broader subcultural milieu marked by the pursuit of “dual excellence at both study and play”, which functions as a particular type of symbolic resistance enacted by academically elite youth against traditional educational control. I then move on to use Bourdieu’s field theory to analyze how KCRC members’ higher educational status allows them to acquire symbolic profit through subcultural

participation. This, as I will illustrate below, encourages KCRC members to pursue a “comparable” musical achievement, and therefore facilitates the collective cult of instrumental virtuosity and the popularity of heavy metal among the elite youth group, as they function to be “effective” tools for students to articulate their symbolic resistance and secure subcultural distinction. In the final part of the chapter, I endeavor to illuminate an interesting parallel between the way students prepare for academic exams and their strategic choices in subcultural participation. I argue while Bourdieu’s *habitus* allow us to understand the relationship between their subcultural participation and several social characteristics in their upbringing, the institutional arrangement in their educational career advance from high school to university is also critical for understanding how their subcultural choices are framed by their schooling pattern.

More than an Extra-curricular Club: The Rock Subculture in KCRC

For KCRC members, playing rock music is an activity with a high entry barrier that can only be breached by investing abundant time and energy. Their acquisition of musical skills leads them to believe that they are not passive consumers, but instead competent producers, of popular music, with a taste for niche-based music. Compared to easy-listening/pop music, what KCRC members listen to requires specific knowledge and skill to decode and understand. Their goal, according to one core member, is “to sound the same as the CD/MP3” and is what makes KCRC members subjectively perceive their musical activities to be more than just fun: their musical prowess allows them to display to outsiders a symbolic gesture with a clear message that they are treating their musical enterprise seriously. In the actual process of learning to play particular songs—processes such as Stith Bennett’s “song getting” (Bennett, 1980) or Lucy Green’s “learning by ear” (Green, 2002)—the students begin by listening to the song they want to learn, using their own ears to tell the difference in the musical notes and sound nuances. Then comes the subtle coordination between different body parts and the instrument, and then gradually they discern the details of each other’s musical roles. This is often accompanied with specific effect equipment—guitar pedals, for example—to create a studio-like sonic atmosphere. Finally, a professionally recorded work (either live or studio) can thus be reproduced through

the collaboration between band members playing different instruments. The collective musical emphasis on “faithfulness” to the original, and the required musical knowledge and skills—seen as Sarah Thornton’s “subcultural capital” (Thornton, 1995)—in making covers are what endow the members with a sense of professionalism regarding their club’s activities. This professionalism (in playing their instruments), and their shared musical knowledge, skills, and taste, distinguishes them from the majority of other “extra-curricular” clubs, which are less technical and treated as something to be engaged in only after academic duties are fulfilled (as expected by parents and teachers).

These characteristics enable KCRC’s student members to perceive themselves as distinct from other youth leisure groups. The relationship between their group identity and distinctive content in subcultural activities somewhat echoes the emphasis on how subcultural members negotiate their differences from the perceived “others” through distinctive features as discussed in the recent studies of spectacular subcultures. For example, in his study of Goths, Paul Hodkinson reveals how their subcultural identity was consolidated by their stylistic distinctiveness as compared with the constructed “trendies” (Hodkinson, 2002). Similarly, Sarah Thornton also illustrates how clubbers emphasize their “hipper” musical taste, in contrast with the imagined “mainstream” (Thornton, 1995). In these studies, the collectively shared distinctive style which allows the subculture’s members to be different from the outsiders is considered to be the common ground for the formation and consolidation of subcultural identity. While endeavoring to keep away from the deterministic tendency as presented in CCCS literature, however, they tend to take an “internal perspective”—by focusing on the events, venues, the shared symbolic system, and the media, while excluding the issues concerning social structure and division—in interpreting the formation and the operation of youth subcultures. Such an approach, unfortunately, leads to the neglect of the relationship between the specific patterns of subcultural participation and the external structure, which still plays a significant role in shaping contemporary youth cultural lives (Bosé, 2003; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2006). For example, Hodkinson has mentioned more than once that the majority of Goth participants are well-educated as well as middle class (Hodkinson, 2002; 2004; 2011). According to his interviewees’ response, their social identity is based more on their subcultural affiliation than on the traditional social marks such as social class and

race. This leads him to emphasize more on the roles of stylistic distinctiveness and subcultural events in shaping subcultural identity than structural factors (Hodkinson, 2002). In my own view, however, such an account does not mean that the issue of social division is irrelevant to Goth subculture; Hodkinson still fails to answer a question which clearly remains in reference to the Goth scene: why and how are non-white, middle-class young people peripheral to this subculture? This problem also appears in Sarah Thornton's study of club culture (1995). From her description of the club scene, a systematic exclusion of the social groups other than white, middle-class youth can also be identified. But she also fails to provide any account for such an exclusion and the affinity between club culture and white middle-class youth.

The Broader Subcultural Milieu: Symbolic Resistance through Pursuing Leisure Achievement

In my study, though the aforementioned musical features help to forge KCRC's specific group identity, the pattern of their subcultural pursuit was also embedded in the subcultural milieu of the pursuit of dual excellence in both study and play, as shared by the academically elite youth. This subcultural milieu is mainly manifested in students' intensive engagement in student club activities. For elite students, club activity was as significant as school success, if not more so, and often became the main reason for their constant truancy. Yeh's portrayal of campus life in the best high school in Taiwan is an excellent example:

It is very common for them to be 20 minutes late for class ... Such situations become even more serious in the second year, when many students simply disappear from the class because they are the core members of the student clubs. As a matter of fact, they are practicing the guitar, rehearsing the band, organizing club events, or planning for summer training. (Yeh, 2015: 57)

Yeh's statement perfectly conforms to what I have witnessed in my fieldwork in KC High School. In my study, KCRC members were often able to acquire "pre-stamped" absent notes which were issued without the teachers' knowledge and allowed students

to leave lessons without any sanction; these became useful tools for students who wanted to cut class to attend band practice.³⁵ To students, truancy for club activities means far more than deviance. It's a mark of their commitment to their club's activities, together with a collectively shared attitude that they are willing to "sacrifice" study time for leisure achievement. Such a tendency conforms to certain aspects in the CCCS's conceptualization of "symbolic resistance" and "subcultural solution," as already illustrated in Chapter 1, to the condition of existence (Clark et al., 1976). The rebellious gesture, displayed in the way elite students dedicate themselves to the sphere of "play," can be seen as a subcultural response to the educational conditions which they are facing: the questions regarding the long held-sacred status of elite high schools and their elite students were raised by ongoing educational reform starting in the late 1980s. By engaging in the collective pursuit of dual excellence at both study and play, students struggle both to redefine the ideal image of elite students and to assert autonomy over their time use, something traditionally controlled by their parents or guardians. It represents their symbolic resistance to the dominant educational idea which required them to focus solely on obtaining exam success. One KC high school graduate vividly interprets the collectively shared enthusiasm in club activities back in his school days: "most of us spend a lot of time in club activities to prove that we were not just good at taking exams, as was supposed by the parental expectation."

For KCRC student members, dedication to the rock club's activities represents a symbolic rejection of educational control. As already mentioned in Chapter 4, in Taiwan's contemporary history, rock music has long been perceived as a problematic form of youth subculture and was associated with students of lower educational establishments. As Mr. Chen, the gig organizer of the most famous live venue, "Idea House," in the 1970s, observes, "Students of regular high schools were facing more academic pressure and prohibited by their parents to engage in such problematic activities [as rock]." Even in contemporary Taiwanese society, the majority still perceive rock culture as problematic, due to the rebellious image commonly promulgated by the local mass media (for example, news stories about drug-related issues at rock festivals).³⁶ Since the early 1990s, many rock clubs were established in

³⁵ In the normal procedure, students obtain the absent notes officially from their teachers.

³⁶ See, for example, Hsieh, 2015.

different high schools. According to my interviews, however, many of them had had a hard time with the school authority due to rock's "negative" image that had long existed in Taiwanese society. For example, in SZ Girls' High School, the rock-oriented club's official title is the "Modern Music Club" instead of "Rock Club," as the former seems more value-neutral to the school authority. In PY High School, the same club uses the title of "Western Music Club" for the same reason. Apart from these, there are even more schools where students play rock music under the title of "Guitar Club." In this symbolic context, a rock club represents a more rebellious and autonomous option for elite students than other "safer" club options, which have a better chance of being more tolerated by the older generation.

On the other hand, a rock music club requires its members to invest abundant time to practice their instruments and participate in musical events. In many schools, the rock club is often viewed by the school authority as a substantial threat to students' academic performance. Many interviewees from different schools mentioned that the school authority would actively attempt to persuade the parents of would-be rock club members to re-direct their children's intentions. In this social situation, joining a rock club represented a rebellious gesture through taking club activities seriously, rather than following the authority's definition that participating in a student club was simply an extra-curricular activity. KCRC members believe that what makes their club crucially different from other extra-curricular activities is that KCRC members are proud of their "true playing" dedication. As former club leader Yu indicates, "One of the biggest differences between KCRC and other clubs is that while other clubs tend to end their activities before the crucial term exam period, KCRC keeps on going."

Conceptually, the collective pursuit of dual excellence at both study and play is relevant to what Shildrick and MacDonald says about a more "generalized, loosely bounded, and unlabelled" forms of delinquent subculture, rather than the "well-known, tightly defined, and stylistically spectacular subcultures" (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2006: 134) as often criticized by post-subcultural theorists (for example, Bennett, 2005; Muggleton, 2000). It can be understood to be an ideal type which is useful for understanding the symbolic entity which inextricably links to a specific structural position shared by the youth group members (parallel to the "masculine subculture" (Clarke et al, 1976) or the "counter school culture" (Willis, 1977) presented in some of the CCCS's works). As I illustrate below, the properties of their structural position

in the educational field allow the social meaning and function of their subcultural practice to go beyond the valence of “symbolic resistance” as stressed by CCCS theorists; they also enable the elite students to acquire symbolic profit and secure subcultural distinction through subcultural repertoires which ostensibly seem in conflict with mainstream educational values. This specific mechanism of social reward directs KCRC members to pursue a comparable and almost “rankable” leisure achievement in playing rock music. Under this circumstance, musical genres with emphasis on instrumental virtuosity become useful cultural tools that satisfy students’ subcultural need both to activate an effective resistance to educational control and to be distinguished from non-elite student groups.

Disinterestedness, Symbolic Resistance and Symbolic Profit

Leisure/stylistic competition is also a significant aspect in youth (sub)cultures. However, it is relatively marginalized in CCCS studies due to one methodological bias: while CCCS theorists tend to focus more on economically deprived young people, in most of their studies the social meaning of youth culture is interpreted as equivalent to the resistance of subordinate youth against hegemonic culture, while not leaving much room for valences other than resistance. In real life, the social meaning of youth subculture could never be just a uni-directional resistance of the subordinate against single dominant target. Ross Haenfler argues that subcultural resistance is “contextual and many layered rather than static and uniform” (Haenfler, 2004: 407); specific subcultural practice could appear to be resistant against certain targets at one level, while presenting a different valence against different targets at another level (Haenfler, 2014). In his studies of the straight edge (or “sXe”) subculture, Ross Haenfler reveals that the subcultural practice of sXers demonstrates resistance against the “largely unquestioned assumption that alcohol be part of most social situations” at the macro level, while seeking to distinguish themselves from a perceived intoxicated youth culture at the meso level (ibid.). In my study, the aforementioned subculture of the pursuit of dual excellence at both study and play not only allows academically elite students to demonstrate resistance against traditional educational control and parental expectation. At another level, such resistant gestures allow them to be distinguished

from students of non-elite high schools, and thus secure subcultural distinction.

In many ways such a symbolic gesture also conforms to what Bourdieu calls the “disinterested act” (Bourdieu, 1998). In Bourdieu’s framework, this concept refers to a social action that ostensibly seems to outsiders to be distant from, or even opposed to, personal interest or benefit—particularly in an economic sense, and is often relevant to the detached, noble state of affairs. For example, avant-garde artists’ strong devotion to pure art, which obviously cannot assure economic profit or material benefits, is the very manifestation of disinterestedness in the eyes of those who are not involved in the field of artistic activities. Their bohemian ways of life can be seen as a particular type of subcultural resistance to mainstream values in the nineteenth century (Bourdieu, 1995).

For Bourdieu, the idea of disinterestedness is based on the false dichotomy of the idealist disinterestedness and the narrow economic version of interest, which reduces the meaning of interest to mere material benefits or monetary profits. This false dichotomy, according to Bourdieu, is the very product of economism, which is deeply rooted in a social universe of human activity that is not yet well-differentiated and “consists of applying to all the universe the nomos characteristic of the economic field” (Bourdieu, 1998: 84). By combining his approach with Durkheim’s analysis of the division of labor, Bourdieu argues that the evolution of societies triggers the differentiation of the social universes, “which have different, irreducible ‘fundamental laws’, and which are the site of particular forms of interest” (ibid.). As he argues in *In Other Words*:

... there is not an interest, but there are interests, variable with time and place, almost infinitely so: there are as many interests as there are fields, as historically constituted areas of activity with their specific institutions and their own laws of functioning. The existence of a specialized and relatively autonomous field is correlative with the existence of *specific stakes* and interests ... (Bourdieu, 1990: 87–8)

Therefore, even the most selfless devotion, imbued with the appearance of disinterestedness, as he argues, cannot be interest-free and is aroused by the specific form of “stake” (artistic authenticity) that makes the agent “caught up in and by the

game, of believing the game is ‘worth the candle’, or more simply, that playing is worth the effort” (Bourdieu, 1998: 76–7). The stake here, according to Bourdieu, is different forms of reward of the field that triggers the practice agents, whose involvement in the fields is mediated by their *habitus* that enables them to recognize the stake, and to take particular forms of practice to win the prize. Bourdieu introduces the notion of symbolic capital and profit, which in his framework are the great motors that inspire the agent to behave in disinterested ways and which can only be recognized by the agents with relevant *habitus*. Bourdieu thus demonstrates how we can identify the subtle, camouflaged interests behind the appearance of piety, virtue, disinterestedness, and so forth (ibid.), which are the very stake in the social universes of symbolic exchange in which these behaviors are rewarded. The “interests” here, in Bourdieu’s eyes, are far beyond the narrowly defined economic benefit. This tells us more about the acquisition of legitimacy, a state of being recognized and believed, and the symbolic power to define the order of things. Thus, legitimacy can be acquired through the symbolic negation of the mundane interest (Bourdieu, 1990: 118), often by resorting to more objective, universalized values or ideas, through which the intricate power relations and material benefits involved can thus be disguised.

Although “resistance” is not a core concept in Bourdieu’s field theory, the conceptualization of the “symbolic rejection of mainstream value” in his analysis of cultural distinction allows us to revisit the issue of subcultural resistance through exploring the relationship between symbolic profit and symbolic resistance. The sphere of youth leisure activity can be treated as a relatively autonomous field with its own specific logic of operation which emerged with contemporary social transformation during the post-war era. In such a field, unique forms of “interest” exist, often in the disguise of disinterestedness, that motivate young people to pursue subcultural distinctions which often appear to be distant from mainstream values (Thornton, 1995; Hodgkinson, 2002).

In my studies, the academically elite students’ dedication to club activities can also be seen to be a kind of disinterested act, motivated by a specific form of interest that appears to be in contrast to the mainstream values that prevail in the educational field. In Taiwanese society, high school students are situated in the educational field where academic success is the core interest. To those who are not students, the elite students’ devotion to their club activities is just an obvious waste of time, which could

otherwise be used to engage in activities with “substantial returns,”; that is, the students should use their time to study and attain exam results that will admit them to an elite university. For the non-elite high school students, the after-school hours that elite high school students devote to club activities are luxury items—“time free from necessity,” and the “precondition for the initial accumulation” (Bourdieu, 1986). As soon as they enter high school, non-elite students need to bridge the gap in the *exam capital* between themselves and the elite students, who instead use such time in the sphere of “unnecessary” activities.

In the social dynamics between elite high school students, non-elite high school students, and the parental generation, spending after-school hours in the sphere of non-academic activities is a show of disinterestedness and can generate symbolic profits for the students who practice such activities. Students of elite high schools have already accumulated a more than sufficient amount of “recognized capital”—that is, a good exam record and academic status—and thus have already attained the most privileged position in the educational field. In the same way that Bourdieu’s bourgeois tend to invest in unnecessary spheres of activity to secure cultural distinction (Bourdieu, 1984), these elite Taiwanese students could only secure further distinction through deep involvement in the sphere of play, which is ostensibly in contrast to a mundane interest in the educational field. On such a structural position, the strong devotion to club activities, to a large degree, allows the elite students to break away from the stigmatized image of “being able to do nothing but study.” On the other hand, performance excellence in club activities can earn them the reputation of versatility—“study well, play well”—which perfectly exemplifies what Bourdieu calls the “profit of universalization” (Bourdieu, 1998: 89–90), as it is in fact a *concrete repertoire* which *seems* close to the universal idea of “diverse learning” and away from the notorious label of “study machine.” In a recent debate on whether the elite high schools should be retained in Taiwan, students from the elite high schools justified the legitimacy of preserving their schools with the collective emphasis on student clubs, against the common stereotype that students in this educational position were just practicing rote-learning.³⁷ (That is, their intensive engagement in and devotion to club

³⁷ JS CK63rd (2012) About Chien Kuo High School: Why Do We Resist the Unreasonable Parts in Educational Reform. *ET Today Forum*, retrieved from www.ettoday.net/news/20120501/42891.htm.

activities give the appearance that the elite students are more committed to their leisure activities, despite the fact that rote learning still dominates their academic life.) In everyday life, such subcultural engagement is manifested in students' collective pursuit of a cool image—"I'm wearing the uniform of the most elite high school but I'm also much better in the sphere of play than those who are academically inferior to me"—which defines the most desirable image for a successful high school life.

The cultural logic behind this subcultural tendency is in part similar to Sarah Thornton's description of the subcultural competition in the club scene, in which subcultural members are in competition with each other in terms of whose musical taste is "more hip" to enough of a degree for one to secure subcultural distinction (Thornton, 1995). Apart from this similarity, there is one key difference between my argument and Sarah Thornton's conceptualization of subcultural distinction. In her analysis, the differentiation of the status among different members in the club scene is relevant to the amount of recognized insider knowledge possessed by the subcultural members. While she endeavors to emphasize the intricate relationship between the media operation and the shaping of the logic of subcultural capital, the roles of the patterns of social division appear rather unclear in her analysis of subcultural value and hierarchy. Therefore, as Hollands comments, it still "begs the question of how cultural capital, and indeed her own concept of sub-cultural capital, relates to social categories like class, gender, ethnicity and, importantly, 'place'" (Hollands, 2002: 156). In my studies, students' subcultural status is connected to their structural position in the educational field. In the sphere of student club activity, not all young people could acquire symbolic profit by intensive engagement in the leisure sphere. As we have seen, students of elite high schools have acquired an excess of "recognized capital," that is, academic success. The possession of both recognized capital and social position allows them to manipulate the system of differences to their benefit and thereby secure the profit of distinction (Bourdieu, 1991), hence attaining the reputation that they are "not only students at elite high schools, but also excel at playing." Such a reputation is the very form of reward which conforms to their structural position in the educational field, which functions as Bourdieu's conceptualization of "stake" in the "field" which motivates elite students to invest abundant time and energy to pursue leisure achievement.

Therefore, in reality, such an image can only be attained under the premise of possessing enough symbolic capital by carrying the title of the elite high school, which is an institutionalized and state-sanctioned synonym of useful, necessary resources in the education in Taiwan. These resources are the legitimate form of cultural capital—that is, useful exam techniques. In fact, in the social universe of campus culture, excellent performance in the sphere of “play” alone cannot be rewarded; it needs to be legitimized by excellent performance in the sphere of study. In my study, the straight-A students can usually earn a reputation for versatility by achieving something in club activities. However, a failing student’s outstanding performance in non-academic sphere of activity is always complimented with sentences that start with “*although* he/she does not achieve good grades” In spheres that have not yet acquired legitimacy in Taiwanese society—for example, street dance and rock music—outstanding achievements made by failing students might be attributed to the idea that “because they do not study well, they spend time on these activities instead.” Therefore, in my study, students from elite high schools generally demonstrate higher commitment to leisure activities, such as rock music or street dance, than students from other types of schools.

Heavy Metal, Instrumental Virtuosity, and Subcultural Distinction

The subcultural milieu of the pursuit of dual excellence at both study and play requires not just an attitude of “study hard, play hard,” but “study *well*, play *well*,” which can only be attained through visible, measurable accomplishment. Their substantial performance allowed KCRC members, as agents of a higher position in the field of high school education, to effectively articulate their symbolic resistance to their parents’ or guardians’ expectations by striving for excellence “even” in an “unproductive sphere of activity.” With such a subcultural need, genres marked by the emphasis on comparable playing techniques, particularly heavy metal and instrumental rock, became the dominant mode of musical operation in their rock world.

When reviewing the history of rock music in the Anglophone world, heavy metal can be traced back to the decline in popularity of psychedelic music at the end of the 1960s, which was followed by the further differentiation into country rock, progressive

rock, and heavy metal (Bennett, 2001: 43). The emphasis on instrumental virtuosity has long been the core feature in heavy metal. As Will Straw argues, the development of heavy metal's sound was "frequently based in the chord structure of boogie blues, but retaining from psychedelia an emphasis on technological effect and instrumental virtuosity" (Straw, 1983: 97). Apart from African American blues, classical music has also significantly influenced the development of heavy metal. From Ritchie Blackmore and Randy Rhoads in the 1960s, Eddie Van Halen in the '70s, to Yngwie Malmsteen in the '80s, the development is "the appropriation and adaptation of classical models," which "sparked the development of a new kind of guitar virtuosity, changes in the harmonic and melodic language of heavy metal, and new modes of musical pedagogy and analysis" (Walser, 1992: 264).

In the West, heavy metal has arguably been heavily male-dominated and popular among those with low educational achievement and socio-economic status (Bennett, 2001; Shuker, 1994; Breen, 1991). In Britain, for example, "heavy metal musicians and fans emerged from the manual working classes," whereas the musicians and fans of progressive rock had a middle-class, university educated background (Murdock and McCron, 1976; Willis, 1978; Macan, 1997). Such a socio-economic trait is believed to be relevant to the obvious masculine elements and violent sexuality commonly presented in the heavy metal genre. These elements are considered to be in conflict with the culture of the educated middle class, but appeal to the white working class of low educational achievement. Thus, as Straw puts it:

The nerd is stereotyped as unstylishly dressed and successful at school: it is precisely the preoccupation that is seen as rendering the boy oblivious to dress, grooming, posture, and social interaction (particularly as related to sexuality). If, within a typology of male identity patterns, heavy metal listeners are usually in a relationship of polar opposition to "nerds," it is primarily because the former do not regard certain forms of knowledge (particularly those derived from print media) as significant components of masculinity—if the "nerd" is distinguished by his inability to translate knowledge into socially acceptable forms of competence, heavy metal peer groups value competencies demonstrable in social situations exclusively. (Straw, 1983: 105)

In Taiwan's youth culture, however, heavy metal appeals mainly to elite high school students. As already stated, since the early development of high school rock, heavy metal covers have been the most common repertoire in the musical practice of elite high school students. Especially for KCRC, since its establishment, heavy metal has long been the toughest genre in the musical practice of the members: from the collective fever of Bon Jovi, Guns N' Roses, and Metallica in the early 1990s, the growing popularity of Dream Theater after the mid-'90s, to the current collective craze for the Avenged Sevenfold, Alter Bridge, and Lamb of God after the turn of the century.

In my study, the commonly perceived emphasis on masculinity and violent sexuality in heavy metal seems to have less appeal than in the western context. For the students, this genre is significant because it allows them to learn about serious musical knowledge and techniques. In the students' shared musical perception, heavy metal aesthetically features the rich deployment of the "most virtuosic" skills, with which they can display their subcultural superiority. For the KCRC guitarists, for example, the "signature" skills of heavy metal such as "shredding," "sweeping," and "tapping" are those that require the most effort to master. Similarly, the rich deployment of "blast beats"—particularly the frequent use of fast double bass drumming—is what makes heavy metal the drummers' favorite. Interestingly, the genre is not as popular for KCRC bassists, as there is not too much "virtuosity" in the common repertoires of heavy metal bass. Among the KCRC bassists, the most popular genres are funk and disco with the rich deployment of "slap bass" and other skills that emphasize the bass melody in the overall arrangement.

In a technical sense, musical competition requires clear criteria instead of diverse, open-minded assessment standards. Otherwise, the idea of "the best" cannot be put into practice, nor could the position of "the superior" be realized. In their musical practice, such requirements are clearly reflected in the patterns of their choices of covers: songs which technically allow students to "progress" and to "distinguish the strong from the weak" are preferred. Genres with an emphasis on instrumental virtuosity thus become the optimal choices, as they allow the students to distinguish between "strong" and "weak" playing skills. More specifically, skills such as shredding, sweeping, and tapping in the guitar, or the blast beat in the drums, are assessed with a few "almost measurable and comparable criteria" such as speed, clarity, and rhythmic precision. These criteria allow the students to compare themselves with

each other, making their instrumental performance “rankable.” Speed is the most common and valued dimension used by students when comparing themselves with each other. With the use of an electronic metronome, musical ability is thus quantifiable and comparable. A former member, Lin, illustrates how KCRC guitarists used to compete with each other in terms of speed of play:

Lin: In the second semester of the first year, we were taught to play shredding guitar. Basically, we were all required to reach 140 BPM in playing quadruplet before June. But at the time, one guitarist, Feng, in our club could play up to 220 BPM. I don’t think at the time he played steadily at that speed, but our teacher just told me that he had already made it.

Researcher: In what situation did he tell you this?

Lin: I guess he just wanted to provoke me to spend more time practicing the guitar.

Researcher: How fast did you play then?

Lin: At the time I had reached 160, sometimes even 180 but not steadily. I did go to Feng and ask him, “Can you really can play at 220?” And he did show me a little bit with the electronic metronome.

Instead, songs which do not emphasize conventional rock techniques are usually discouraged, as they are perceived to be relatively “fuzzy,” more aesthetically diversified, and thus they don’t help students to “progress.” Most works from the ’90s Brit-pop bands are considered to be “catchy but not technically challenging,” because most Brit-pop solos (mostly guitar) are too easy compared to those in heavy metal music. Junior members are not allowed to cover punk music, the justification being that there are usually no guitar solos in punk songs, so one cannot make progress through learning them. In a KCRC guitar session, for example, a junior student was severely warned by his senior members, because he chose to demonstrate his learning outcome by playing Radiohead’s *Just*, which the seniors considered unhelpful for the development of playing techniques:

Shiuedi [juniors], I want to sincerely advise you that you must be very, very careful in your choice of covers. Some of the songs that you are trying to play are

just obviously unhelpful for your playing skills. Like in the one he just played, there is no proper guitar solo, and the pattern of the chord structure is unconventional. Nothing can be learned from it.

By the acquisition of the “hardest skills,” student members are able to articulate a series of particular discourses marked by resistance to parental expectations. Student club activities are presumed by the parents’ generation to be extra-curricular activity, which comes second-place after academic duty. However, mastery in instrumental virtuosity gives students the sense that their musical activity is almost a professional trade. This not only allows them to “effectively” reject the traditional educational expectation that “the elite should only focus on study,” but also puts them in a “win-win” situation by achieving what non-elite pupils cannot achieve even in the non-academic sphere. The former club leader, Hsieh, describes with pride how their club was different from the majority of “ordinary high school rock clubs”:

We don’t play covers because the song sounds pleasant; we play them because of the particular techniques contained in the songs. We normally choose songs with a high technical barrier—the play techniques in the songs were basically beyond the high school standard. To put it simply, our musical activities are not just student club activities, as is supposed by parents and teachers.

Replication: Exam Culture to Rock Subculture

Since the development of youth subcultural studies has undergone the so-called “post-subcultural turn,” the issues concerning social and cultural reproduction have been marginalized in most studies of youth subcultures. This is primarily because, while most youth cultural theorists are more interested in the more stylistically spectacular subcultures, and they tend to focus on the question of how the subculture is distinctive from the rest of society, rather than how the subculture replicates certain aspects of the rest of society. In fact, social reproduction had been a significant dimension in the CCCS’s conceptualization of subculture. But it is seriously neglected due to later researchers’ interests in distinctiveness over sameness. In the introductory chapter of

the classic *Resistance Through Rituals* (Hall and Jefferson, 1976), Clark and colleagues argue that although a subculture is different from the parent culture in important ways, the two still share something basic and fundamental. Paul Willis further explores in depth the relationship between subculture and social reproduction in his classic work *Learning to Labor* (1977). In his ethnography, the counter-school practices displayed by the lads were the reflection of several distinctive qualities in the shopfloor culture—as a central part of the parent culture—including masculine chauvinism, struggle for control of time use, and a disdain for theoretical knowledge.

In my study, the way in which students engage in rock activity also shares significant similarity with the wider exam culture in which they are situated. In many ways, the technical requirements of acquiring virtuosic skills are in striking synchrony with the learning disposition of elite students, which is largely shaped by ongoing exams from the elementary level up to high school. Like many of its East Asian counterparts (Korea, Japan, Hong Kong and China), Taiwan's education system is characterized by fact-based pedagogy and intensive examination, that emphasize the ability to supply the right answers, and a task-based learning approach. Emma Vanbergen, a British woman working as a Shanghai-based Study Abroad Director for BE Education, which places Chinese students in British schools and universities, provides her observation of the highly competitive education system in Shanghai; her account nicely illustrates the typical situation:

To gain entry to the next level of the system from primary school onwards, schools rely on testing. The higher ranked the middle school, high school or university, the higher the requirements for entry. Thus, from a young age, students get thrown into an endless cycle of learning, preparing for, and taking exams—they are simply extremely hard-working study machines who memorize and churn out answers for tests in minutes. They spend all their time on study, revision, homework, “pre-study” (a term I'd never encountered until arriving in China), learning test techniques, and taking practice papers.³⁸

³⁸ Emma Vanbergen (December 4, 2013) “Shanghai PISA pupils: ‘They’re not super clever – just study machines,’” *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/10496039/Shanghai-PISA-pupils-Theyre-not-super-clever-just-study-machines.html>.

Vanbergan's description easily applies to Taiwan. In fact, from the advent of Joint Exams in the 1950s, the "endless cycle of learning, preparing for, and taking exams" has long been the core practice of the Taiwanese education system. As Yeh Shu-Hung illustrates in his studies on the learning practices of Taiwanese elite students, the successful acquisition of these abilities relies on the austere cultivation of the "studying *habitus*" that strictly restricts leisure activities and is based on intensive rote learning (Yeh, 2015). In practice, this is commonly accomplished through "pre-study" (studying ahead of the school schedule) in cram-schools or at home during after-school hours, and through the habit of active revision and repetitive test practice to be able to instantly and correctly respond to the test questions. More importantly, students need to be inculcated to be willing to pursue this particular kind of achievement, as part of their *habitus*, which can only be satisfied by overcoming challenging test questions that distinguish the elite from the mediocre.

In the daily context of KCRC, the techniques commonly used by elite students in preparing for exams are also fully manifested in the way students engage in rock activities. Similar to the excellent exam strategies that they have acquired throughout the education process are their virtuosic musical skills, which are what distinguishes them and enables them to claim superiority. To acquire these skills, most members are "trained to be willing," that is, to devote considerable time to practicing a limited repertoire, such as a narrow range of scales or similar songs. The collective tendency to "focus on one thing" and to exercise self-discipline in preparation for the institutionally recognized event—whether exam or student gig—are believed to be what enables elite students like KCRC members to achieve in both spheres. When asked about the superior status of his club, Hsu, a former KCRC leader, considered the characteristics that enabled him to score highly in exams as directly relevant:

It is the same in the sphere of school work and exams. I mean, we can totally focus on one thing when we want to achieve something. Back in junior high school, I could sit and concentrate on my studies for a long time, and that was what made me become a student of KC. Now I am just playing the bass with a similar kind of attitude.

Similarly, the owner of a famous music shop, Mr. Wai, who is hired by many high schools to teach in the rock clubs, also stresses the straight-A students' advantages in playing rock instruments:

Students of lower-rank high schools tend to fool around, even when they are performing. Students of better academic performance concentrate much better in any kind of activity. The poor academic performance of the students of lower-rank schools simply reflects their lack of concentration. For example, the rock club members of the best high school in Taichung would always book the rehearsal room right after they finished their school exam. Leisure came after rehearsals. It is just the attitude that creates the huge gap between students from schools of different ranks when you consider the students' achievements in many spheres of activities.

Such a collectively shared tendency was surely relevant to the particular childrearing practices of Taiwan's middle-class families, marked by the predominant emphasis on educational accomplishment (Lan, 2014; Yeh, 2015; Liu, 2006). At the more concrete level, however, the shaping of such a disposition was embedded in the temporal rhythm constituted by incessant institutional events, driven by every single rewarding mechanism—particularly the school exams. Under these circumstances, what students had been taught and trained could gradually become an integral part of their bodily scheme (Bourdieu, 1984; 1998). The rock practice of KCRC's student members was also framed in their educational career advance from high school to university level, which revolved around the university entrance exam. Similar to schoolwork, club activities are conducted in a limited range of time. After the end of the annual gig, students need to "retire" from the club and quickly switch to "revision" mode to prepare for the university entrance exams. Thus, the amount of time they can devote to instrumental practice is, in fact, less than two years. With the purpose of "defeating" other schools in playing techniques, learning the songs with the most challenging techniques as quickly as possible is the club members' central aim. In KCRC, when new members join the club, senior members immediately begin to stress the importance of learning and practicing ahead of schedule and urge the juniors to master the playing techniques to get ahead of junior members in other schools. KCRC

members are required to make their covers choices as early as possible, and then to concentrate solely on those choices right up to the gig. Such a practicing repertoire closely follows the model of students “pre-studying” for school term exams—that is, they begin their prep work very early and focus only on the exam, going through endless practices in an almost mechanical way. One of KCRC’s former leaders, Mr. Tsai, recalls the pattern of his musical practice back in his day:

Mr. Tsai: I used to listen to something more, you know, indie like. Right after I became the leader, I started to seriously choose the songs which I could cover. I mean the kind of songs which allow us to seem very virtuosic in gigs.

Researcher: Wasn’t it too early to choose the songs for the annual gig? That was still one year before the event

Tsai: Yeah, when they chose me to become the leader, my seniors told me that, “Hey fuck, you need to prepare for the annual gig from now on. You need to know that the best players of other schools might spend almost a whole year to practice just one virtuosic song. You all need to be aware of your situation and start to prepare as early as possible. Especially you. You are the leader. You need to decide on one instrumental song now. You better now start listening to solo bassists like Marcus Miller or Larry Graham.”

Cram-schooling is just as indispensable for efficient pre-studying. When new members join KCRC, they are “ordered” to spend extra money and time learning from professional musicians in the music shops—the musical version of cram-schools—in order to “win at the starting line” (贏在起跑點上), as the KCRC senior members used to stress. The following is a conversation between senior and junior club members during the induction session, on the necessity for “musical cram-schooling”:

New junior member A: Do we still need to go for private tuition, since there will be club lessons organized by senior members?

Senior member A: After you each choose the instrument position you want, you can start looking for a private teacher. Otherwise, your learning progress will fall behind the students in other schools.

Senior member C: No matter which instrument position you choose, seeking a private teacher is necessary, if you want to achieve something. The earlier you go to a private teacher, the more benefits you can get, so that you can win at the starting line.

“Win at the starting line” is an established saying in Mandarin-speaking regions. By comparing educational competition to a race, the phrase has been part of a common discourse that emphasizes the importance of “learning ahead of schedule.” This phrase is commonly used by “pre-study cram schools”—private learning institutions that provide lessons ahead of the school schedule—to advertise the advantage of “speeding up and being ahead of the school timetable” in the educational competition. Most importantly, they advertise that students’ learning progress is guaranteed, guided by the professional (sometimes even idolized) cram-school teachers, who expound the tricks of the trade in exam-taking: “techniques in answering exam questions,” “precise prediction of exam questions,” “revision techniques,” and so forth. For student musicians in high school rock, well-known instrumental teachers are similar to the exam revision cram-school teachers, as they not only guarantee to set the students on the right learning track, but also promise to teach them the “winning techniques.” Cheng, another former KCRC leader, recalls how he was inspired by another rock club’s technically excellent cover and subsequently decided to take lessons from a famous session bassist so that he could outperform his rivals:

I went to GC rock club to see the rehearsal of the students in my grade. They were playing a Red Hot Chili Peppers song, and the bassist’s slapping was fucking astonishing and far beyond my ability at the time. At that moment, I suddenly felt an urgent need to make some changes. I felt I had wasted a lot of time and done a lot of wrong things, listened to the wrong music, and learned from the wrong teacher. Afterward, I quickly went back to our club and told the guys that we were totally defeated. I immediately started to search for bass teachers specializing in slapping. When I first attended the lesson, I told my teacher that in the coming year I only wanted to focus on slapping skills, that I wanted to learn a different bass slap riff every week.

The most interesting part in this description is Cheng's intuitive action to search for a skilled, specialist tutor, after he perceived the need to surpass his musical opponent in one particular playing technique—slap bass, which is institutionally recognized in the high school rock field—and to be achieved in a specific period of time (one year). In our interview, he also mentioned that before he joined KCRC, he used to be a fan of indie-oriented music, which was gradually classified by him as “pleasant but skill-less” kind of music after he committed himself more and more to the rock club. His action of searching for a famous tutor, and focusing on the bass slap technique are a great example of the reproduction of the learning repertoires from the exam culture in the sphere of playing rock music, which has been inscribed in his bodily disposition—the *habitus*—through endless exam preparation, and would be reproduced in different sphere of activity through his *habitus*. As a system of embodied disposition, the *habitus* would lead the agent to make specific strategic choices which conforms to his/her structural condition—a condition which encouraged him to take specific strategies to pursue musical excellence within a limited range of time in exchange for the accompanying reward.

How Subcultural Choices were Framed: The Interplay between Educational Career and Leisure Career

What is similarly important is the interplay between their “leisure career” and “educational career” when advancing from high school to university. “Career” can be understood as a pathway which involves the interplay between the choice-making in different parts of life—family career, educational career, leisure career, criminal career, and so on. This concept is useful to explore and constitutes:

... the way that individual decision-making, informed by the cultures and subcultures from which young people originate (and originate themselves), interacts with the socially structured opportunities facing people as they move through the youth phase to create individual and shared paths of transition. (MacDonald and Shildrick, 2007: 342)

In their studies of street-based leisure activities in the North East of England, MacDonald and Shildrick utilized the conceptualization of “leisure career” to equate to the “dominant modes of free-time, leisure activity and socializing engaged in by a person and how they change or persist over time” (ibid.: 341): “Leisure careers were shaped by other important aspects of transition—such as ‘school-to-work’, family, housing, criminal and drug-using careers—along with locality itself” (Shildrick and Macdonald, 2006: 131). In my study, the time-structure formed in the transitional process from high school to university—which is constituted by the schooling events such as enrollment, attending classes, school work, term exams, advancement to higher classes, graduation, taking the university entrance exam—directly constrained the available choices that KCRC members could make and shaped the specific trajectory of their leisure career in rock activities. In the first year, they were presumed to be lacking musical experience and exhorted to dedicate themselves to practicing the basics. Thus, they did not have substantial performing opportunities before they became second-year students (see also Chapter 8). In their third year, they all needed to transform into full-time exam candidates for the university entrance exam. Under this circumstance, the time for them to engage in playing rock music was less than two years, while their performing opportunities were concentrated in the second academic year. Specifically, student gigs were organized along the lines of the school calendar which is structured by the progress of academic learning and exams. In every semester year, there were four main performing opportunities for KCRC: the welcome gig at the beginning of the semester year, the first inter-school gig during the winter vacation, the second inter-school gig after the first-term exam in the second semester, and the annual gig before the final exam of the semester year. These gigs determined the way KCRC members engage in their daily rock activity: their engagement in their daily practice aimed for an outstanding performance in each of these gigs.

Moreover, KCRC members needed to allocate their time-use between attending classes in the school and cram-schools, school work, exam preparation, and club activities. Limited time and a limited number of performing events constitutes the opportunity structure for KCRC members to engage in their rock activities during their transition from high school to university. In order to attain excellence in their performance in the student gigs, they need to make efficient and effective investment of their time focusing on the musical choices which are able to create “high rates of

return”: the kind of musical genres marked by the emphasis on instrumental virtuosity which most effectively allow them to look musically strong. As one ex-member of KCRC, Chu, mentions, “pursuing instrumental virtuosity was basically a ‘musical short cut’ which allowed us to look musically transcendent to other normal high school students in a short period of time.” In this transitional process, the sphere of rock became an arena extended from the academic exam for status struggle, while pursuing exam success and excellent musical performance could be achieved by similar means through the mediation of their *habitus*. One ex-leader, Jenbo Chen, recalls the affinity between their rock practices and exam preparation:

We only got the second year to play on stage. So we tended to choose the songs which made us looking musically as strong as possible to make covers ... We weren’t actually creating things at the time. It was almost similar to revising for the exam. Like we used to commit to the textbooks and then took exams when we were studying in junior high school. In high school, it just turned to learning other people’s songs very carefully, following the electronic metronome strictly. Throughout this process you did not need to think at all, you did not create, you did not know why you were doing this.

Conclusion

The collective emphasis on esoteric musical knowledge and virtuosic techniques in the way KCRC members engage in their rock activity imbues them with a sense of professionalism which distinguishes their club from other “extra-curricular” youth leisure pursuits. The KCRC rock subculture also needs to be understood through the broader subcultural milieu shared by the academically elite youth, which is marked by the collective pursuit of dual excellence at both study and play. Under this subcultural milieu, the intensive engagement in the leisure sphere allows students from elite high schools to both redefine the ideal image of elite students and assert autonomy over their time use, something traditionally controlled by their parents or guardians. It represents their symbolic resistance to the traditional expectation which required them to focus solely on obtaining exam success. Also, the characteristic of their structural

position—i.e., the possession of a high amount of recognized capital and status in the educational field—allows them to accumulate symbolic profit through participation in a subculture which ostensibly appears to be resistant to traditional educational control. Such structural advantage motivates the elite students to be more willing to dedicate themselves to school club activities than students from non-elite high schools. This specific case, which contains two contradictory cultural characteristics (subcultural resistance and cultural distinction), allows me to adopt an analytic strategy which adapts Bourdieu's field analysis to the CCCS's subcultural theory: "to put subcultures into the field."

Through revisiting Bourdieu's critical analysis of the disinterested act (which can be seen as a type of resistance to mainstream values and thus shares similar logic with the conceptualization of symbolic resistance), I argue we can integrate Bourdieu's theory of cultural practice with the concept of subcultural resistance to explore the issues concerning social rewards and cultural distinction in the studies of youth subcultures. We can examine how the act of symbolic resistance—equating to Bourdieu's disinterested act—to mainstream values, which is enacted by the agent of different field position, brings different social consequences and evaluation to the social agent that correspond to his/her field position. This approach allows us to examine how specific sets of reward mechanism, which correspond to a specific field position, influence the extent and the way that young people of different field positions engage in subcultural participation. In the case of KCRC's rock subculture, their advantageous field position not only makes their members more willing to invest abundant time and energy to engage in rock activities, but also orients them to focus on the particular kind of musical repertoires which are more technically effective for them to demonstrate a symbolic gesture that "they could also outperform non-elite students even in the subcultural field." It was under this subcultural milieu that heavy metal, as a genre marked by the strong emphasis on instrumental virtuosity, became the most popular music genre in KCRC. The quality that heavy metal is relatively more technically demanding allows the elite students, who are driven to engage in subcultural competition by their competitive disposition, to pursue almost rankable achievement in the leisure sphere, thus effectively securing subcultural distinction and articulating their symbolic resistance to the parental expectation by striving for excellence "even" in an "unproductive sphere of activity."

Furthermore, I also identified an obvious correspondence between the way KCRC members engage in rock activities and how they prepare for academic exams: they intuitively adopt common strategies in exam preparation—self-discipline and intensive concentration, pre-study, and cram-schooling—as major ways to engage in playing rock instruments. While Bourdieu’s *habitus* is useful for illuminating the correspondence between their rock subculture and exam culture, an institutional analysis centered around the interplay between students’ “educational career” and “leisure career” is also helpful for us to understand how these learning repertoires become the necessary choices for students to engage in their rock subculture at this phase in their lives.

Chapter 8

On Becoming A Member

On December 21, 2012, I first gained access to the field of my research—the club space (社辦) of KCRC. I was accompanied by Winters Lin, a graduate and former KCRC member from 2003 to 2005. When Winters, a “grand senior” of this club, led me to their club space, a student quickly made a deep, 90-degree bow to us, as he “sensed” our presence while sitting on a school chair and practicing the bass in the hallway outside of their rehearsal room. He was one step ahead of our noticing him, and I was shocked by this abrupt behavior, while Winters was surprised by his “quick reaction,” though not as surprised as me because he had experienced this before. As we entered their rehearsal room, one second-year student was playing his mp3 player through the power amp. I waited for Winters to introduce himself to the student, and talked to him about my research. Similarly, as this student was told that Winters was a former member and that I was the leader of another high school rock club, he quickly saluted us with a series of body movements, including a bow less extreme than the 90-degree one in the hallway. Soon after we left, I had a question in mind: Why and how did the first student so abruptly bow to us while he did even not know who we were?

As I increasingly immersed myself in their group life, I soon realized that these ritualistic behaviors were part of a particular system of social order which had long existed in their club. Within this system, the junior members need to submit themselves to the senior members, along with displaying specific forms of greeting—like bowing—which symbolize their respect and obedience to the latter. On the other hand, the senior members constantly deployed a series of hazing practices to discipline the junior members, practices which might sometimes have a faint whiff of bullying. This situation may be normal in some group contexts like a military camp or a fraternity. In the case of this study, however, these behaviors happened in a social context, that is, a subcultural group of which the core activity was playing rock music, which was in common sense hardly related to the aforementioned authoritative elements. The seeming contradiction here raises several questions: for students, what is the relationship of bowing to playing rock music? Why and how could rock music activity co-exist with a regime which seemed obviously authoritative? How would the new recruits, who chose to join the club because they had a dream of playing rock n’ roll,

experience and interpret these organizational processes? If, at the outset, these contrasted to their expectations before joining, how did the new recruits accommodate themselves to this regime and then turn into the core agents of the group? How was the newcomer transformed from an outsider to a committed member?

With these questions, this chapter aims to revisit the issues concerning member recruitment, identity and commitment in the studies of youth cultures. Traditional subcultural theorists tend to focus on the relationship between participants' social background and patterns of subcultural choices and participation (Cohen; 1972; Willis, 1977; Hebdige, 1979). Recent studies show interests in the active role of subcultural events and the media in mobilizing would-be members—by channeling participants with similar tastes and disposition to the exclusive events to interact with other insiders and thus strengthen their collectively shared subcultural identity (Thornton, 1995; Hodkinson, 2002). In studies of college youth groups, the elective affinity between members' social disposition and tendency prior to their participation and the organizational culture was also emphasized to illuminate member recruitment and the consolidation of group identity (Boyle, 2015). In these studies, the social process of how an outsider becomes a committed subcultural member, which may involve a series of cultural confrontations, social negotiations, and significant socialization mechanisms, is often taken for granted and neglected. This chapter seeks to problematize this process by presenting the ethnographic details of how KCRC members experience their organizational process, and how their ways of life and social identities are reshaped in this process which allows them to acquire genuine subcultural membership.

The analysis in this chapter in part owes a debt to Susie Scott's concept of *reinvented institution* (RI, hereafter). An RI, according to Scott, refers to a place or collective context, which has flourished since the late twentieth century, to which people "retreat for periods of intense self-reflection, education, enrichment and reform ... in pursuit of 'self-improvement'" (Scott, 2010: 218). Several particular forms of social organization and institution—including military camps, college fraternities, student clubs, therapeutic clinics, educational hothouses and subcultural groups—can be categorized as specific forms of RIs. In her definition, several features in RIs, such as insularity and high levels of social control, have persisted but they have evolved from the design of Goffman's *total institution* (Goffman, 1961; TIs, hereafter).

In both RIs and TIs, members undergo a sociological process marked by the transformation of the self and identity in a rather insular social context. The major difference between RIs and TIs is that while the membership in a TI is usually based on authoritative coercion (e.g. prisons or asylums), in an RI, the participation usually takes place under members' own volition. As with the TIs, however, the operation of several types of RIs, like military camps or fraternities, also heavily relies on intense social control and authoritative disciplinary mechanisms that reshape the members. For the studies of RIs, therefore, the core issue is to examine how members are content to accept the specific group norms and value system which are obviously in contrast to their "home world" (ibid). In my study, while many organizational features in KCRC perfectly conform to Scott's description of RI, such a perspective is useful for us to unveil the social process through which the collectively shared subcultural values in KCRC became an integral part of new recruits' social identity, and how the new recruits evolved into committed members. Later in the chapter we shall see that this process is not simply just "recruiting the right kind of people." It entails what Scott calls "the reinvention of the self" (Scott, 2010; 2011) which could only be attained through the constant negotiation between new recruits' original cultural habits and identity and the operation of the disciplinary mechanism—training, learning, dominant value (taste) and social punishment and rewards—in the group context.

The Pattern of the Senior/Junior Relation in KCRC

In KCRC, members' organizational lives were composed of three temporal phases determined by the grade levels of high school education in Taiwan. In each phase, members were assigned particular roles with clearly defined organizational statuses and obligations.

The first-year students—the juniors: in the first phase, the new recruits were neophytes with incomplete membership, who needed to experience a series of initiations and follow the seniors' instructions to learn about the shared norms, group values, and musical skills and knowledge. They were the rookies who needed to first cultivate the right attitude that was crucial for one to properly progress in playing the instruments. While the majority of the performing opportunities belonged to the

seniors, the juniors were required to spend most of their time practicing the basics. The basic practices such as “chromatic exercises,” “scale exercises,” “playing with the electric metronome,” and so forth, were, as the senior members kept stressing, the most essential elements at this learning stage, even for those who may have already acquired a certain extent of playing skills before joining the club. It was only through this process that one could gain complete membership before entering the second year; otherwise, one might be forced to quit the club or be marginalized and left with few performing opportunities.

The second-year students—the seniors: once the junior members passed through the basic instructions and acquired complete membership, they then entered the second phase coinciding with their second year of studies. Members in this phase were the main force of the club. On the one hand, they needed to perform their best on behalf of the club in gigs; on the other hand, they were the agents of the club who needed to ensure that the collectively shared norms and skills that they inherited from *their* seniors were properly passed on to the next generation. In other words, this was the phase where members were given both the right to perform in public and the power to discipline the juniors.

The third-year students—the grand seniors: this phase began after the members selected the new leaders from their juniors before the end of the second academic year. In this phase, the members generally focused on the university entrance exam revision without involving themselves in club activities. However, this did not mean that they no longer had substantial power in the club. In fact, they could still exert some influence by advising the second-year students. There were several occasions when the third-year students would be invited to the club to review the musical performances of both the second- and first-year students.

In Taiwanese society, the senior/junior relation was first introduced by the Japanese colonial government as an essential component in educational arrangements (Chu, 2005; Yeh, 2005). Students of higher grades were endowed with the power to discipline—including both physical and verbal abuse—the students of lower grade for any indiscretion. After the end of the colonial era, this relationship persisted and has played a central role in membership training and the allocation of group resources and job duties, particularly in institutions like military camp, sports teams, educational institutions (that is, schools and student clubs above the level of high school), medical

training institutions, and some specific work environments (Chen, 2010; Kao, 2005). The senior/junior relation in KCRC to some extent shares this similar socio-historical trait with that in other institutional contexts. However, it was also distinct from the others due to one contrasting feature: the seemingly authoritative senior/junior relation was also a means for KCRC student members to pursue subcultural achievement against another authoritative regime, that is, educational control from the parent/guardian generation. The senior/junior relationship framed the way student members engage in their subcultural activities, ranging from the collectively shared subcultural values and aesthetic beliefs at the most abstract level, and the social relationship between members of different grade year at the meso-level, to the nuances in the knowledge and the specific ways of using one's body in learning to play rock instruments at the micro-level.

Music transmission in KCRC generally occurred within the senior-junior relationship from generation to generation, through which the succession of the collectively shared musical orthodoxy was maintained. The seniors were mentors who exercised ultimate authority in the juniors' organizational lives, and the juniors were required to obey and respect them. In their daily interaction, a series of rules regulated and maintained the power relation between the seniors and the juniors. In the encounters between a junior and a senior on any occasion, the former was required to display his respect to the latter with a 90-degree bow and say "xue chang hao" (in Mandarin, "xue chang" means "senior"; "hao" means "well" and follows titles to greet the title's owner). In conversation, the junior could only address the senior by "xue chang" rather than by name, and needed to keep his head down and avoid any eye contact. In their club space, endless bowing and greetings during the after-school hours were common. Whenever the juniors spotted a senior, they all needed to perform these rituals. In my fieldwork, it was a common sight to see juniors continually bowing and greeting whenever any senior was repeatedly entering or leaving the club space.

In their musical training system, the seniors played the role of masters, whose duty was to transmit what they had learnt from *their* seniors to the juniors. In each week of the first semester, there were instrumental tutorial sessions organized by the seniors during after-school hours. Throughout the first year, the juniors did not enjoy much leeway in their choice of musical practices. They needed to obey the seniors' instructions, and to spend most of their time practicing the boring basics. When it came

to demonstrating their progress in playing by ear, the seniors would also monitor their choice of songs. Even when they started to form their bands in the second semester, their choices of covers still required the seniors' approval.

The unequal distribution of club duties also highlighted the rigid role division between the seniors and the juniors. In daily activities, juniors were in charge of the routine chores such as cleaning and running errands for the seniors. When it came to KCRC's musical events, the juniors would be assigned with sundry duties, such as holding guideposts for the audiences, receiving the guests, or acting as if they were enthusiastic fans in front of the stage while their seniors were playing. At any musical event, they could not act independently and were required to stay with their group under the guidance of the seniors. Any action irrelevant to the musical event was prohibited, or they would be condemned. For example, in one weekly meeting at the beginning of the academic year 2012–13, the new juniors were seriously scolded by the seniors because a few of them were playing with their smartphones when attending the welcoming gig organized by the guitar club:

We were very, very disappointed that only very few of you attended the welcoming gig of the guitar club. We've told you more than once that this event was very significant. What was more disappointing was that some of you were even playing with your phones during the gig. Fuck, how many times we've told you that anything irrelevant to the music is prohibited! When you are in a gig, you just focus on the music, and I promise that you could learn a lot from the performance. You can think about why their performance made so many people stay until the end of the event.

This social relation was framed by the grade structure accompanied by a huge gap between the status of their roles. In terms of physiological age, there was not much difference between juniors and seniors: some juniors could be the same age as, or even older, than the seniors. In Taiwan's educational system, the existence of an intense senior/junior relation generally occurs after the level of high school. In addition, while it is common to identify high levels of social control in some institution like sports teams, nursing and medical schools, marching bands, and so on, the existence of this social relation in a seemingly rebellious leisure group is rather unusual. Any freshman

joining the club would have never experienced this particular pattern of organizational life and lacked the relevant “tools” to interact with the seniors. In fact, many of my respondents mentioned that, at the very early stage of membership, they often questioned why the seniors treated them in such degrading ways, since they were so close in age. This situation shows a problematic point in their membership acquisition: if the new recruits did not fully agree with the gap in the status between theirs and the seniors’ during their early organizational career, then there is a need to explore through what social process they were transformed from the skeptical outsiders into committed members. For further analysis, a few questions needed to be answered: how was one trained to act obediently, and how was their social distance concretely created in their daily interaction? How was a junior coerced to consent to and accept his subordinated status?

Training to Be Obedient

In his famous study of total institutions (TIs), Goffman identified a coercively transitional process through which new recruits’ original ways of life were curtailed so as to be transformed from being outsiders into inmates. As he notes:

It is characteristic of inmates that they come to the institution with a ‘presenting culture’ (to modify a psychiatric phrase) derived from a ‘home world’ – a way of life and a round of activities taken for granted until the point of admission to the institution ... The recruit comes into the establishment with a conception of himself made possible by certain stable social arrangements in his home world. Upon entrance, he is immediately stripped of the support provided by these arrangements. (Goffman, 1961: 23–4)

Although such description was first made for the analysis of TIs, as Susie Scott notes (2010; 2011), the involved process of the transformation of “self” is also commonly presented in contemporary RIs. The second socialization in the school—as a type of Scott’s RI—which every child would experience is a typical example. In this process, one essential step is that the children need to learn proper behavioral codes

and accommodate themselves at the level of social interaction. Moreover, a TI is more of an ideal type than a rigid, definitive concept in Goffman's analysis, which can be used to illuminate the extent to which the targeted institution conforms to the qualities in the perfect model. For example, prisons, boarding schools, and military camps are all perceived to be different types of TIs in his analysis (ibid.). While they all involve the process of reshaping members' self and identity, however, the levels of social control in these institutions are different from each other.³⁹

As with the organizational careers in other types of RIs, during the early stage in KCRC, new recruits also experienced the similar process in which their original ways of life were modified. When first joining the club, the first lesson for seniors to impart to juniors was, through redefining the interactional codes, to let the juniors know that their relationship was not "friend to friend" but "senior to junior." Soon after the first-year students joined KCRC, their first task was to learn the proper codes when interacting with seniors. It was common for juniors to greet seniors with "hi," "hello," or waving hello, because that was how they interact with friends in the "home world." For seniors, therefore, this was the core dimension of their disciplinary practice at this stage, as the juniors' behavioral codes did not match the proper social distance between the seniors and the juniors in the organization.

In KCRC, when a junior encountered a senior, the former should perform a proper greeting with a specific physical code accompanied the verbal greeting "xue chang hao," and not by waving hello and saying "hi." When parting, the junior should say "goodbye" (再見) rather than simply "bye" (掰掰), as the latter was too casual. A junior could not even "friend" a senior on Facebook, because this violated the hierarchical relation between them. In the club-imposed definition, they were not of the same generation (平輩), nor could they be friends. It was via this series of interactional codes that the proper social distance between the seniors and the juniors could be established and maintained, hence the obedience of the latter to the former, so that the juniors would then treat what was taught or said by the seniors as absolute law, rather than some random suggestions that they did not need to care about. This hierarchical relation operated to serving the core organizational aim, that is, to transform new recruits into committed members who were content to dedicate

³⁹ This is why in Susie Scott's studies military camps and boarding schools are categorized to be types of RIs, instead of TIs, as their memberships are based on individual volition.

themselves to practicing instruments and enhancing their musical ability, in order to maintain the social status and reputation of their group.

For the new recruits, it was crucial that they adapt *at this stage*, as these interactional codes were drastically different from those in the spheres of normal social life. They would face difficulties in defining the situations, and struggle to evaluate to what degree to carry out these codes of politeness. For example, the juniors would hesitate to bow obviously to a senior in the presence of other authoritative figures—such as parents or teachers. When meeting a senior in the presence of classmates who were not club members, the junior would, on the one hand, worry that he might be mocked by his classmates, and, on the other hand, be anxious about the possible punishments incurred by failing to conduct a proper greeting. JT, one ex-leader of TFG rock club in which the senior/junior relation was also a core organizational frame, recalls the kind of embarrassment which she constantly faced during her early days in the club:

JT: At the early stage, every time when I met a senior member of the club while I was walking on the aisle with my classmate, you know, I need to bow to the senior right away. My classmate would then laugh at my bowing after I did that. But I still needed to bow explicitly in this situation, because I was afraid that the senior did not notice my bowing.

Wang: This is fascinating, you were afraid that your bowing might not be noticed by the senior because you did not want give them another chance to scold you, but at the same time you were also worrying that your classmate might make fun of your bowing.

JT: Yes. And sometimes when I saw a senior, even though she was still far from me, I still needed to initiate an explicit bowing and say “xue-jie hao.”⁴⁰ I would also worry that she might not have noticed my greeting. But if I said it too loud, then I would attract everyone’s attention on the aisle and embarrass myself. So every time when I saw a senior, I need to deliberate the timing for greeting.

⁴⁰ In Mandarin, Jie is the character for “sister”. “Xue-jie” refers to the female senior.

Wang: So your bowing was often ridiculed by your classmates?

JT: They would just make some fun of it, they all knew that's what it likes in the rock club.

In addition, at the early stage, their established habits interfered with the way they carried out the greeting rituals. For example, some first-year students might unconsciously wave hello to the seniors at the first moment of their encounter and then soon fix their "misconduct" through other body gestures right after they realized that waving hello was an inappropriate gesture. As one former member of KCRC, HL, recalls:

When we first joined the club, it was common that some juniors sometimes scratched their heads when they encountered the seniors. That was because they suddenly realized that they were not allowed to wave hello to the seniors in the middle of their waving movement, so they immediately altered the movement by stretching their hands to the back of their head and to pretend they were just about to scratch their head.

The seniors found these ambiguous, indecisive manners, which frequently appeared in the early stages of the juniors' organizational career, absolutely intolerable. According to their own first-year experience, absolute obedience was one key factor for the club to sustain its honor and tradition from year to year, generation to generation. Under this circumstance, a disciplined body was the very premise to achieve this.

Hazing /Disciplinary Rituals in Weekly Meetings

Hazing is a ritualistic process commonly seen in some certain types of RIs, like college fraternities, sports teams, military camps, and so on. In the hazing process, the group's new recruits experience degrading and humiliating treatment from the senior members which serves to test the newcomers' loyalty and commitment to the group, and strengthen the collective power of the group (Scott, 2011: 135). In KCRC, a series of hazing rituals were regularly deployed to transform new recruits' behavior and identity.

Every Monday, KCRC organized their weekly meeting during the lunch break from 12:00 to 13:00. At 12:00, the seniors gathered in their rehearsal room to discuss club affairs, and at the time the juniors were supposed to gather in the hallway outside the rehearsal room. After the seniors finished their discussion, they would call the juniors into the rehearsal room to carry out the weekly announcement and hazing rituals.

The first weekly meeting could be analogous to the initiation rituals of fraternities or sports teams in the US (see, for example, Sweet, 2004; Crow and Rosner, 2004), in which the seniors utilized a series of degrading treatments to make the juniors learn obedience and to gradually accept the seniors' dominant status in the group. In the first KCRC weekly meeting in the academic year 2012–13, for example, the seniors first ordered each junior to avoid any eye-contact with the seniors by yelling, "Keep your heads down!" as each of them walked into the rehearsal room. Most juniors were unfamiliar with this social situation and had no idea about either the seriousness of this order or the possible punishments which might be incurred if they did not follow this order properly. Thus many of them still could not help but glance at those who gave the order when they walked into the rehearsal room. For the seniors, regardless of whether the glance was intentional or not, it was the exact opportunity for them to exert their power over the juniors, collectively yelling, "What the fuck are you looking at? Just keep your head down, don't you fucking understand?"

The seniors only stopped yelling when all the juniors had finished assembling in the rehearsal room and kept their heads down in front of the seniors. Afterwards, the seniors took turns to pounce on and criticize every improper behavior that they observed from the juniors since the beginning of the semester. The following quote is an example of how the seniors "disciplined" the juniors via a series of hazing practices in the first weekly meeting of the academic year 2012–13:

Senior A: Xue-di (juniors), I remember telling you that wherever you meet us, you need to greet us. That is to say, be aware of your politeness. However, as we have observed throughout last week, we found that there has been barely anyone doing it properly.

Senior B: Fuck! Do you not recognize us yet? Don't you know how to greet us?

Juniors (in unison): Xue chang Hao.

Senior C: Only one of you was greeting us when you came into this room. What

the fuck were the other people doing?

Senior D: And those who came to the club space acted as if they did not see us.

Senior E: They did not even greet us when we met outside, not to mention in here.

Senior B: Fuck, and very few people have come to the club space, did we not tell you that you can start to come to the club space to practice? Don't you want to make progress?

Senior F: We offer you the amps to practice, and if you come we will help you to check your playing ...

Senior B: Don't you fucking understand how to say thank you?

Juniors (in unison): Thank you, xue-chang.

Senior A: The seniors teach you how to play the guitar, how to play drums. You need to keep respect in mind, and remember to say thank you. Also, very few people stay in the club space to practice during the after-school hours.

Senior B: Didn't so many of you [all the juniors], who looked so arrogant by the way, come to the recruitment fair? But look how many of you actually came here to practice? You think you are good enough because you have learnt some before? Also, some people came to the rehearsal room without knocking on the door, or came to practice without bringing their instrument.

Senior A: And there were those who borrowed the instruments from the seniors without saying thank you.

A few juniors: Thank you, xue-chang.

Senior A: Okay, now there is the other thing. We'll be having our Welcoming Gig this Saturday. The gig will start at 17:30. I want you to assemble here by 14:00. All of you need to put this as the priority in your schedule on that day. Wear your uniform and don't be late; otherwise, you won't need to come here anymore.

Senior B: Now we need to assign a few tasks to you on that day. We need three guys for the reception, and a few guys to take charge of the spotlight.

Junior A: Xue-chang, what is the job content of the reception?

Senior A: Standing there and receiving the students from other schools, and behave politely. Don't lose our face.

Senior C: I remember someone waving hello at me a few days ago ...

Senior B: Waving fucking hello? You think you already know us very well?

Senior A: I tell you what, you need to use proper greetings. We don't mean that you can only do this by bowing, but waving hello is crossing the line. It's like you treat us as if we're in the same year as you.

Senior B: The Welcoming Gig is of great importance. The way you behave will affect your image in the eyes of the students from other schools. Don't make KCRC ashamed.

Senior D: Drummers, I remember that so many of you told me that you have learnt to play the drums before, but you did not show up here to practice.

Senior B: You think you're good enough just because you know some basics?

Senior A: Last year a lot of us [now seniors] voluntarily stayed here to practice until the late evening from the beginning of the academic year. Many of us even stayed until 9:30 p.m. But you? I tell you what, the sooner you start to come here to practice, the more you can surpass the student musicians from other schools. Don't you understand how important this period of time can be?

Senior B: Also, the only things you can do here are practice and group meetings. I just saw a few guys bringing their lunch here before this meeting. What? You think you're here for a picnic? You are here for the weekly meeting, not a fucking picnic! You don't even have the basic attitude, let alone practicing.

Senior C: Didn't we mention that attitude is the most important thing in this club? Where is yours?

Senior B: No matter during lunch break or after-school hours, you can just come here. You can also come here on the weekend. Don't you understand how many hours you can spend in practicing during the weekend? Don't bullshit me that you have been studying very hard right after the school open day.

This lengthy "conversation" clearly showed how several group rules were emphasized and enforced through defining the acceptable behavioral codes, often expressed in degrading language. Such disciplinary rituals would be carried out in KCRC every Monday at noon, wherein the seniors would criticize all the improper behaviors they observed. The range of their disciplinary practice not only contained what could be observed in the club space, but also outside the club space. However, in most social situations outside the club space, the seniors will not directly scold the

juniors, especially when there was the presence of other social relations than the mere senior/junior relation which might potentially interfere with their disciplinary act, such as the presence of school teachers, or their encounters in the tube station.



Figure 8.1 Assembly at the weekly meeting (those with heads lowered were junior members)

During the weekdays, whether inside or outside the club space, seniors would continue to monitor the juniors, and would share what they had observed with each other, which gave them legitimate excuses to scold the juniors during the weekly meetings, when there were no other external force to interfere with their dominant power over the juniors. For them, there was a huge difference between life inside the club space and outside it. Under the school's policy of student autonomy regarding club activities, club space could be seen by students as a relatively autonomous social system which had its own logic for the operation of social order. In addition, KCRC's club space was in the basement of the building for non-academic subjects—art, music,

and craft. The building was geographically peripheral on the campus and thus relatively remote from intervention by the school authorities. As with some fraternities which are both geographically and symbolically isolated from the outside world, the physical and symbolic boundary of KCRC facilitates “a sense of privacy, individuality, and isolation” (Scott, 2011: 130). Under these circumstances, there would only be one kind of social relation, that is, the senior/junior relation, which frames the particular mode of interaction and the content of their daily activities. Only in the circumstances of serious incidents, or when the school authorities came to the club space for official business, would the social order framed by the senior/junior relation be provisionally interfered with. For example, one night during the first semester of academic year 2011–12, after the drummers’ club exam, the seniors were smashing chairs and other objects to show their dissatisfaction with the juniors’ performance. The loud noise attracted the school authorities, who came to the club space questioning if the juniors were being bullied. The students had to pause their hazing practice in the presence of the “outsiders.” The senior/junior hierarchy and related interactions only resumed after the school authority stopped interfering.

In the weekly disciplinary rituals, the second-year students would increase the different types of hazing repertoires. For example, when the juniors gathered in the hallway waiting for the seniors to call them into the rehearsal room, some seniors would keep walking in and out of the room, repeatedly slamming the door, so that the juniors would be in a fearful state for the entire meeting. After the juniors finished gathering in the club space, the seniors would sometimes stay silent for 3–5 minutes to create a serious atmosphere, and then suddenly yell at the juniors, who weren’t really mentally prepared for this. For the juniors at the early stage, each weekly meeting represented a serious cultural and mental shock, until they gradually got used to it as the number of meetings increased.

Turning Consent into Obedience: The Welcoming Gig

Not long after the juniors were recruited into the club, the second-year students would organize their first gig: the welcoming gig (迎新演出). In its literal sense, this was an event for the seniors to welcome the juniors through performing on stage. However, it was by its nature the first musical event organized by the seniors themselves, so it

serves the significant purpose of establishing their authority over the juniors through displaying their instrumental virtuosity in front of a huge audience from many other schools.

High school rock clubs' performing events usually could mobilize hundreds of audience to attend their gigs (as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 9). Especially for KCRC, because it had long been renowned for its high-quality reputation, their welcoming gig usually attracted nearly a thousand audience members from different schools. Throughout the gig, the members from different schools would not only play the role of audience members, but they would also arrange some particular acts to interact with their acquaintances performing on stage. They might collectively call the names of particular players to show their support, or arrange their juniors to engage in the kind of acts to represent their immersion in the gig, such as "moshing"⁴¹ or showing a "cornea."⁴²

In my study, the welcome gig was the crucial turning point where junior members' expectation of their future high school life would be shaped. As Hodkinson notes in his study of Goths, participation in subcultural events is a significant avenue towards the accumulation of subcultural capital and social connection. Participants develop a sense of belonging, identity, and commitment to the subcultural group through engaging in the social interaction in the subcultural events exclusive to people with similar tastes and styles (Hodkinson, 2002). In KCRC's welcome gig, the attendance of abundant student members from different schools allow the new recruits to develop expectations for their future subcultural participation: developing friendship, or even romance, with student members from other schools, and most importantly, to realize their subcultural capital through performing before a big audience from other schools just as what their seniors did. Their seniors became the role models for them to worship and imitate. More precisely, on this occasion, juniors worshipped not only their seniors, but also the stage of the high school rock field, and expected that they would one day replace their seniors on stage. As one former leader,

⁴¹ A style of dance where participants push against or slam into each other, commonly seen at a live rock show.

⁴² A "cornea" is a hand gesture formed by extending the index and little fingers while holding the middle and ring fingers down with the thumb. It is a popular sign in heavy metal for both the artists and fans to express their enthusiasm.

KH, recalled:

When we first attended the welcoming gig organized by our seniors, it just made us feel that it was a grand occasion. There were so fucking many audiences from different schools. It showed that we were not just a club limited to our campus, but an influential group greatly admired by many students from different schools. Actually not many of us were musically competent enough to tell how good our seniors were when they were playing on stage. But the large crowd could directly make us feel that we were like a super group. Then we started to think, yes, we definitely needed to be as good as our seniors the next year.

Therefore, this was the first occasion where the juniors, as the new recruits to the field, started to be attracted into the games of the position-taking in this social universe. They were, in Bourdieu's words, "caught up in and by the game" (Bourdieu, 1998: 76), the game of struggling for the fame of both the strongest club and the best student musicians. The huge audience in the welcoming gig was a clear message to them: once they properly survived in this club, it would be them standing on this stage next year.

As with other types of RIs, KCRC's organizational operation also required high levels of both social control and members' commitment, while at the same time being in conflict with members' original ways of life in the "home world" (Scott, 2011). Therefore, KCRC shared a similar problem with many different types of RIs: while the group membership was based on individual volition, ways to make the new recruits willing to endure the harsh training and remain obedient was a problematic issue in their organizational operation. In KCRC's training system, the weekly hazing rituals and the welcoming gig can be considered to be two mutually reinforcing mechanisms which served to resolve this organizational problem. First, the weekly meetings functioned to both discipline the juniors and eliminate those who could not endure the collectively shared mode of training. The welcoming gig helped to shape the juniors' imagination of their future performances and their admiration for their seniors. It was with the operation of these two mutually reinforcing mechanisms that the hazing practices and the military style training were rationalized as sensible, and the juniors were thus more willing to accept the harsh trainings and their dominated status.

In this light, the hazing ritual in the weekly meeting was in fact a function of

member screening, “testing the will of would-be members who seek acceptance into an exclusive community” (Scott, 2010: 225). Especially in the weekly meeting on the Monday right after their welcoming gig, it had long been a tradition for the second-year students to carry out an extremely intensive disciplinary ritual to, according to an ex-leader, “keep the ones who best fit the demand of the club.” Throughout the disciplinary ritual, the seniors enumerated all the juniors’ “blamable” behaviors that had been observed during the welcoming gig on the one hand, and, on the other hand, kept augmenting the barriers of membership acquisition for the juniors. The seniors would specifically stress that their performance, the reputations they earned in the welcoming gig was at the expense of their academic performance and daily recreation, and set these as the standards for anyone who aimed to keep his membership. Anyone who had no resolution to accept this learning pattern would be encouraged to quit. For the club, the hazing ritual functioned not only to expel the undesirable members, but also to make those who choose to stay more willing to accept the oppressive style of training (cf. De Albuquerque and Paes-Machado 2004; Pershing 2006).

Therefore, through the mutual reinforcement between the weekly disciplinary ritual and the welcoming gig, the seniors gradually transformed into two roles in the eyes of the juniors: 1) musical rock heroes who were worthy of their worship and imitation; 2) dreadful disciplinarians who might occasionally give them unreasonable demands. SJ, a former KCRC leader, mentions how eager they were to do the litter-picking jobs after witnessing the musical strength of their seniors at the welcoming gig:

After joining the club, we would more or less contemplate that, since we all earned a position in this school through similarly excellent exam results, what on earth gave them the right to treat us in such degrading ways? But after we watched their welcoming gig, we did realize that they had something convincing. I remember on the night after they finished their performance, all of us were extremely eager to clean the venue only because some of them asked us to clear up the litter. This was mainly because you could see from them that you might be able to achieve what they just demonstrated in the next year if you properly follow their guidance in the following year.

Daily Music Training Mechanisms

The organizational goal of KCRC was to maintain its leading status in the field of high school rock. As stated in the previous chapter, instrumental virtuosity commonly deployed in particular musical genres was the main musical repertoire for student musicians to secure subcultural distinction. Thus, in the rock club, the degree of the “strength” of one’s skills constituted the main condition to evaluate one’s musical performance. Under this circumstance, dedication to practicing was the main focus of instructions made by the seniors, while the basic playing skills were the main target of their training. Furthermore, as one’s time investment in practicing was the very premise for the acquisition of instrument virtuosity, one had to be strictly self-disciplined. To achieve these, a series of disciplinary techniques were developed to raise the barrier of the musical accomplishment and thereby their consciousness of the need for, and deep dedication to, practicing.

Club Lessons

During the first academic term, KCRC arranged club lessons for different instruments every week. Seniors would instruct the juniors about basic playing skills and particular techniques, and attendance was compulsory for juniors. No one could be absent from the lesson unless they had a very good reason—even cram-schooling would not be accepted as an excuse. Each club lesson was composed of two sessions with routine patterns. In the first session, the seniors instructed on the scheduled content; in the second one they would check the learning progress of the juniors by arranging each of them to display their playing ability.

During each club lesson, the juniors were required to produce particular physical responses to meet the requirements of a proper learning attitude set out by the seniors. They needed to display their seriousness through sitting upright; casual postures, such as hand supporting one’s chin or leg crossing, were not allowed. When it came to the learning progress check, each junior was required to bow 90 degrees to the senior before he played.



Figure 8.2 The weekly guitar lesson



Figure 8.3 In the guitar lessons, lists of “recommended guitarists” were displayed, upon whom the students were urged to model themselves.



Figure 8.4 Diagram for learning the bass fretboard notes, which was used in the bass lesson.

The progress check generally followed the teaching schedule. In each session, the juniors were required to display their ability in manipulating the particular techniques taught by the seniors the previous week, and sometimes they would also be required to display what they had learnt from their private teachers.

The learning progress check functioned not only to systematically frame the juniors' learning progress, but also to monitor how they learned and to further facilitate the continuation of the collectively shared musical body. In KCRC, there were detailed rules of the use of one's body. These not only defined the collectively sanctioned way to present the particular state of relation between the musicians and their instruments, but also functioned as the concrete framework for their disciplinary missions. No matter what sorts of musical genre a club member aimed to manipulate, they would be required to follow standardized ways in playing. For example, in playing guitars, one would always be required to mute the undesirable noises by properly using both hands as usual practice in heavy rock. For each instrument, use of the electric metronome was compulsory in practicing and one needed to follow the electric metronome closely.

The emphasis on particular playing techniques was further reinforced by the seniors' comments, featuring the club's competitive nature. At the end of each learning progress check, the seniors would collectively comment on the juniors' performance. In general, the comments made in each session shared the similar linguistic pattern,

focusing on competitiveness. On the one hand, the seniors kept emphasizing the significance of practicing “basic playing skills” as the premise for one to become outstanding in the field of high school rock. On the other hand, in their use of language, the duality of “strong” and “weak” constituted a linear progressive framework of evaluation that sacrificed other seemingly unmeasurable standards (see also Chapter 7).

Club Exams

In the first term, the seniors would arrange club exams after the end of each school exam. Compared to the learning progress checks in the club lessons, there were more complicated ritualistic procedures in club exams, which were designed to make the juniors take the club exams seriously.

The ritual of the club exams’ procedure usually began right after the end of school lessons (at 17:00), when the juniors would assemble in a neat formation in the hallway of their club space. Before the exam, juniors were not allowed to move about, nor could they eat or use the toilets while waiting. In this period of time, the seniors would first arrange the seating for the club exam, and as with what they normally do in other disciplinary rituals, they would at the same time keep making loud noises, like slamming the doors. Once they finished arranging the seating, the seniors would all go for dinner and leave the juniors standing in the hallway until they come back.

During the club exam, the seniors would call the school number of each junior member to come into the rehearsal room to take the exam. When each junior finished, he was then obliged to go back to the hallway and stand there. The content of the exam usually contained several particular playing techniques and some instrumentalist parts in particular songs that were considered as essential for one’s solo ability. For example, during the “bassist” exam on January 16, 2012, each junior was required to play the following categories in the listed order:

	Category	The Rationale and the Aims
1	Chromatic exercise	To make sure that every note is the same in length and strength Accurate rhythm

2	Hammer on and pull off	No noise in hammer on and pull off The volume of hammer on and pull off should be similar to that when played with picks.
3	Scale exercises	To be familiarized with all the scales at various scale shapes
4	Twelve-blues bars	To get the grooving of shuffle right (twelve-bar blues also come in 4/4, but the shuffle is more difficult)
5	Bridge riff practice	To strengthen the playing of triplets with stable rhythm
6	Song getting/ learning to play by ear	Assigned piece: "This Love" of Maroon 5 Principle: Faithfully represent the details Reason for assigning: the rhythm is difficult for people who had only played for a few months.
7	Note-finding	The senior would say a note, and the junior had to play it straight away. The junior must be familiarized with the position of each note on the fret board.
8	Play Blink 182's "First Date"	To be able to keep up with this song
9	Play the melody of "Jesus, Joy of Man's Desiring" by Bach	To strengthen the finger-rolling techniques and triplets

After each junior finished their part, the seniors would record the pros and cons of their performance. After the last test, the seniors would have a short discussion, while at the same time slamming doors or smashing chairs to "display their disappointment," despite what might have been good performances by the juniors. In the end, they would then call all the juniors into the rehearsal room to carry out the disciplinary ritual through similar procedures to those in the weekly meeting.



Figure 8.5 Junior members assembled in hallway, awaiting the club exam.

In this kind of situation, a series of disciplinary techniques were carefully designed and deployed to motivate the juniors to dedicate themselves to their musical practice, and, of course, to reproduce the hierarchy between them. The seniors were constructed as authoritative figures for the juniors to obey, and all their dreadful repertoires reminded the juniors how difficult it was to qualify as a member. Wang, a former leader, recalled how terrified he and his peers were after one of the club exams:

We were ordered to stand outside the rehearsal room after we finished the club exam. While we waited, some seniors passed us by when they went to the toilet and back, all the while slamming the door as they came and went. Right before we were called into to the room, they started to smash stuff, chairs, fuck! It was as if they were intentionally blocking the way, not wanting us to come into the club space. We needed to stride over a lot of smashed stuff and sometimes we

really felt that the seniors did not want us to come in and that we were not qualified to be their juniors, because we played terribly.

Watch Yourself! Big Brother Is Watching You

Surveillance and Self-surveillance

The juniors' priority in the club was to survive through the elimination mechanism. The survival principle was straightforward and simple but extremely difficult: the goal was to be scolded by the seniors as little as possible.

As stated earlier, whether inside or outside the club space, the juniors' behaviors displayed were under strict surveillance by the seniors. Their surveillance could be both extensive and detailed, including one's politeness to the seniors, degree of devotion in practicing, attendance at club events, use of leisure time, and personal relationships. The real purpose behind this surveillance, of course, is less concerned with the content than the very opportunity for the senior members to exercise complete control over the juniors' behavior, and to "symbolically strip the rookies of their previous identities and render them powerless" (Scott, 2011: 137).

Hidden Club Lessons

The surveillance could also extend to occasions when the seniors weren't even present. In KCRC, there was one particular surveillance technique termed "the hidden club lessons." The seniors extended their power into the spheres of the lives where they could not physically interfere with. The hidden club lessons usually occurred when there were only a few juniors in the club space. A senior would try to provisionally shorten the social distance with the juniors through chatting informally and acting as if they could be "buddies" with each other. This way, the senior could easily obtain information about other juniors, especially regarding their use of leisure time. For the juniors, the opportunity to chat casually with the seniors was a rare honor, and, as the seniors deliberately reduced the social distance, the atmosphere was relaxed, and the juniors would joke about what they knew about other juniors. However, once the

seniors learned that some juniors spent too much time in leisure activities, such as fooling around with girls, playing video games, and so on, they then had good reasons to carry out serious disciplinary ritual in the weekly meeting, or to scold the involved juniors when they did not perform well in the club exams.

The Widespread Disciplinary Power of Anonymized Scolding

In their disciplinary rituals, the seniors would use anonymized ways to scold the juniors. When they were specifically pointing out any junior's undesirable behavior, they would use anonymized terms, such as "someone," rather than directly naming someone. For seniors, this meant that their disciplinary practice was a collective action executed by the "senior group" to teach the "junior group." However, for the juniors, this was in fact more oppressive than if the seniors directly scolded those who misbehaved. This approach forced each of them to carefully review their own behavior, whether they had misbehaved or not. The pressures from the disciplinary practice were created not only by the seniors' accusations, but also by the sense of uncertainty in the anonymized scolding. For the juniors, the only way to ease this pressure was to constantly conduct self-surveillance. As one KCRC member recalled:

When I was a junior, I always felt that I needed to be very cautious about my behavior. In this club, every Monday before the weekly meeting, you would start to recall the things you might be blamed for by the seniors. If you forget to salute the seniors, you would then think, oh shit, there was a senior member passing through and I forgot to salute him. It's over. I will be harshly blamed in next week. Or something like, fuck, I did not spend too many days practicing the guitar. I would definitely be seriously scolded by the seniors later in the meeting.

The Reward System and Strategies for Being a Good Junior

The juniors' self-surveillance could be said to be a kind of passive strategy. That is, their tendency to conduct self-surveillance was the exact outcome of the punishment mechanisms of the club. However, it would not be enough for the organization to attain its goal only with the passive punishment mechanism. The reward mechanism was

also needed so that members would voluntarily serve the goal of the organization through sacrificing their time and energy. It entailed what Susie Scott claims about the disciplinary mechanism in the reinvented institutions which enables the members to “seek to improve, invent, even perfect themselves in accordance with models of expertise” (Scott, 2010).

As will be discussed in the next chapter, the major reward provided by the high school rock field was a good reputation, which could be acquired through performing in front of the members of different schools’ clubs. At the organizational level, the main reward was the opportunities to perform on the club’s behalf at public events. The juniors did not have many performing opportunities throughout their first year, and the only chance for them to stand on stage was the less-than-15-minute opening act of the annual concert. However, this does not mean that there was nothing for them to do about their future performing opportunities. Once one assumed a core position among his peers, his future performing opportunity was almost ensured.

Thus, the question is: how did one become a core figure in their own year? First, leadership succession in KCRC was through appointment by the seniors, so the future status of each junior depended to a large extent on their seniors’ impressions of them. Under this circumstance, to be recognized as a good junior was the substantial reward that they could earn during the first year.

As far as the club was concerned, members’ dedication to the club activities was the premise for successful organizational operation, whereas members’ strong skills were one significant condition for the club to gain and maintain its reputation in the high school rock field. Therefore, these two formed the very basis for the seniors to evaluate the juniors’ performance.

To Be Seen Practicing

In the daily context, the principal way to gain the seniors’ recognition was to go as frequently as possible to the club space to practice. For the seniors, the juniors who came often to practice sessions were the better choices for future leaders, as their presence signaled that they put the club before other spheres of their lives, and indicated that they wanted to strengthen their playing skills. For the juniors, besides frequent practice, active consultation with the seniors about the problems they faced

in playing the instruments was also a direct way to display their proactive attitude. The act of consulting also helped the juniors evaluate their “status” among their peers of the same year. “Being seen practicing by the seniors” could be said to be one significant source of the sense of accomplishment for the juniors. However, when some juniors chose to practice outside the club space, for example, in a music shop, they would need to make extra efforts to “prove” that they were dedicated to practicing, or they would expect that the seniors might show up in the places where they practice. As JK, a former leader, recalled:

When we were practicing the instruments in the classroom of the music shop, we would be in a special state of mind which was very pretentious. We sincerely hoped that the seniors would appear in the shop and witness that we were really spending our time in practicing rather than doing nothing. This was a bit like some people who worked overtime so as to be recognized by their manager as a good employee. Like me, if I chose to practice in the music shop rather than in the club space, there would always be a thought coming into my mind that, “It would be fantastic if any senior showed up!”

To Perform Well in Club Exams

The club lessons and exams were significant occasions for the juniors to exhibit their proactivity, as their playing ability could directly earn the seniors’ recognition. For the juniors, each club exam was an opportunity for them to gain recognition. But a question needed to be clarified first: what did they mean by “playing ability” in KCRC?

As instrumental virtuosity became the sacred rule in judging one’s playing ability in the high school rock field, “precision” and “cleanness” in playing were unquestionably the exacting standards for “good playing ability” in the club. One other significant standard was “faithfulness,” when reproducing the details of the particular instrument parts. While these three constituted the premise for one to gain recognition in the club, performing challenging songs which demonstrated virtuoso playing skills could also help one to get further recognition.

The three standards—precision,” “cleanness,” and “faithfulness”—were collectively believed as the very premise to properly achieve technical proficiency. To

be specific, the juniors were always required to accomplish the following tasks: to maintain a precise rhythm, to mute undesirable noises, and to play with a precise pitch. A common phenomenon in my fieldwork was that certain juniors tended to be attracted to the glamorous skills such as fast guitar shredding, bass slapping, or double blast drumming at the early stage. This was somehow inevitable because some particular genres were considered ideal, due to their emphasis on technicality; however, those who too quickly challenged these skills might easily incur blame from the seniors due to the latter's collective emphasis on "basic playing skills." The juniors became an easy target for criticism when their basic skills could not reach a faster speed, but they went for it anyway. As one ex-leader, I. Sun recalled:

I. Sun: ... Some people could not reach the speed but were still going for it. The notes were all blurred together.

Wang: Meaning that you obviously can't manage the basics, and you were play something beyond your level.

I. Sun: Yes. You wanted to be fast, but you couldn't play well, so everything was blurred together. Like J. Yang, he loved to play fast, but in fact he didn't play well. The seniors were quite annoyed with him.

Wang: I remember that a junior played "You Give Love a Bad Name" in a club exam.

I. Sun: He, too, was severely scolded by the guitar senior. "Fuck! You think you could scare people with a whammy bar. We just complimented you during the previous club exams, but now you haven't progressed at all! What did you do with your winter vacation? You play so poorly but love showing off.

In a learning setting where anyone could easily be blamed for a trivial reason, the seniors' recognition was of extraordinary importance for the juniors. The more recognition one received from the seniors, the more chance they had of being selected as a leader in the future. As already mentioned, the major reward in the high school rock field was the reputation gained by performing in front of a large audience. Therefore, the major reward in the club was the performing opportunity that one could enjoy after entering the second year. The performing opportunity usually involved two often overlapping conditions: playing ability and leadership.

In the club, those who played well tended to cooperate with members with similar competence, and this unquestionably made it easier for them to play in inter-school events on behalf of the club. The members with lower playing ability had fewer chances to pass the club audition.⁴³ On the other hand, in leadership succession, it had long been a tradition that the seniors would select someone with both good playing ability and high dedication as the leader, who usually had more power than regular members in deciding the final result of the audition for the gigs. Compared to regular members, leaders not only had more opportunity to gain exposure in inter-school events, but they also got to interact more with members from other schools and thus to accumulate fame.

Under these circumstances, even though the juniors did not have many performing opportunities in the first year, their daily conduct was highly relevant to their future performing opportunities. Therefore, if one aimed to become an eye-catching figure in the high school rock field, first he had to actively be a good junior in front of the seniors by dedicating himself to the club activities and bettering his playing techniques. At this level, the social control in KCRC was operated not just through seniors' direct repression of the junior members, but also through a specific mechanism which was able to make the latter willing to discipline themselves for the reward, hence dedicating themselves for the group. Particularly when the institutional membership was perceived as voluntary, as Scott argues, these disciplinary rituals "may be welcomed as positive empowering, experienced through discourse of self-improvement that are both internalized and personalized" (Scott, 2010: 221).

Becoming a Member: the Rite of Passage in the "Semester Trial"

During every winter vacation, KCRC co-organized a two-day winter training with their "sister club," the rock club of JP Girls' High School (JPRC). The training

⁴³ Before each gig, every member would review the songs in an audition. In the audition for the annual gig, each member has the right to evaluate the performance of each song, and the ones with the worst marking would be withdrawn. In the auditions for other gigs, the leader and two vice-leaders had the right to decide the set list.

involved instrumental lessons and instrumental battles. The instrumental lessons could be seen as extended club lessons, in which the seniors of each school would first pass on their specialized skills to the juniors, and the juniors would then be arranged to display their learning progress. The battle was an event for the clubs to conduct the semester review, in which the two schools' juniors displayed their best features, whether a particular instrumental part in a song or just some passages of a specific musical riff.

The Instrumental Battle

In the battle, the seniors would first pick two members with similar playing ability and arrange them in the battle position, that is, seated on opposite chairs. After the two were in position, the seniors would try to antagonize them by jeering at them and making them criticize each other. Once the antagonistic atmosphere was successfully created, they would then order one of the competitors to start their first "move." When the first finished, the other would be ordered to "fight back," by performing the same move. Normally, one tended to start with easier moves, and held back the more difficult moves for use later as secret weapons. Each session would keep on going until either side of the match had exhausted all their moves—if one showed their secret weapons too quickly, the session would then finish too quickly.

Once the session finished, the seniors would start marking each side of the match and announce the winner. In general, the seniors tended to announce the results playfully. For example, the seniors tended to give the female competitor a much higher marking when she competes with a male competitor, despite their actual performance. Such a situation usually carried an implicit assumption that the females were unskilled, so the presumed technical skill of the male could be undermined.

On the face of it, the battle was more like a game than a competition. However, the seniors of both clubs actually paid close attention to the performance of their juniors, and the results would become the basis for their further disciplinary practice. In fact, shortly before the winter training, the seniors reminded their juniors to make early preparations for the battle and at the same time threatened that they had already been surpassed by their counterparts in the other club, in order to push them to practice even more.

Semester Trial

After the training sessions of the winter vacation finished at around 5 p.m. on the second day, the KCRC juniors would be ordered to assemble in the hallway outside the club space. The seniors would review the performance of all the juniors during the first semester in the rehearsal room, and discuss ways to carry out the disciplinary ritual later.

This disciplinary ritual was not too different from those in the first semester. For example, while the juniors assembled outside the club space, the seniors would keep slamming the door or smashing chairs to heighten the tense atmosphere. However, this event was far more significant than the previous ones. It was a critical rite of passage in the process of membership acquisition, illustrated by the following two dimensions.

First, this was the only disciplinary event where the seniors would directly “name” the ones to be scolded, and force the less skilled ones to contemplate quitting the club. The seniors first asked if they were really determined to stay in the club. If yes, the seniors would require them to promise that they would thoroughly correct all the unacceptable behaviors. If not, they would be asked to leave right away.

Second, after the disciplinary ritual, the senior member would “order” the juniors to negotiate with each other to form bands for the opening act in the annual concert in the second semester. Before this day, the juniors were not allowed to form bands with either fellow members or with people outside the club. This rule was supported by their collectively shared perception of “musical ability”: before entering into the rehearsal room for band practice, one needed to be sufficiently trained in the basic playing skills; otherwise, bad habits might develop due to the lack of basic skills. After this night, the juniors finally left the individual practice phase. They could really start what they had long imagined, that is, play in a band (although not entirely, because the musical content that they played was still controlled by the seniors).

Before the disciplinary ritual began, the seniors would ask all the members of other clubs on the same hallway to leave, so that they could ensure the ritual would not be interfered with by outsiders. Besides, in order to keep the juniors from recognizing their faces, and to create a much more serious atmosphere, they would turn off all the lights on that floor so that the juniors could not identify the seniors and

were kept in a state of mental uneasiness while waiting for the ensuing disciplinary practice.

The disciplinary ritual contained two parts. The first part was similar to the others during the first semester, in which the seniors would remain silent for several minutes, and then at a signal, collectively roar and swear at the juniors. After bellowing about all the juniors' "mistakes" anonymously, they would order each junior to stand in the center of the rehearsal room to receive their criticism in front of all the members. In general, almost everyone was criticized, no matter how trivial the reason. Moreover, seniors would ask some "particularly terrible" juniors to consider quitting the club. In the semester review in the academic year 2011–12, for example, one junior, "Sam," was targeted by the seniors as the worst and was told he deserved some serious criticism for the following reasons:

1. He had a bad record of missing the routine club events for leisure purposes.
2. He constantly made arrogant remarks on the Internet as a member of KCRC, which might damage their club reputation.
3. He was considered by the seniors as the typical kind of junior who only wanted to practice virtuosic skills and dismissed basic playing skills.

In the trial, the seniors ordered him to stand in the center of the club space, and started to name each of his misconducts in humiliating ways. During his trial, some seniors proposed that he would not be accepted in the club anymore, while others argued that he deserved another chance. In the end, the seniors came to a conclusion that they could give him one last chance, and asked him to make a resolution to definitely correct all of his misconducts.

For the majority of juniors, this trial was as serious as it looked. However, it was actually the repertoire of "bad cop and good cop" that had been arranged in advance before the trial began, through which the seniors aimed to create an atmosphere as if they were about to expel some juniors. In fact, before the juniors were called into the rehearsal room, the seniors had already divided themselves into two groups, one in favor of expulsion, the other advocating a second chance for these juniors. Following this repertoire, the two groups pretended to argue with each other and ended up giving these juniors a last chance to stay. The real purpose behind this trial was clear: to create

a serious atmosphere which facilitated the transformation of the juniors into qualified members.

For the juniors, this was the very turning point in their organizational lives in two dimensions. First, as the trial was a test for their membership acquisition, once they passed through this rite of passage, their successful survival in the club would become of significant value for them. From the beginning of the semester, the whole disciplinary process could be seen as an analogy of the transformation of a rookie into a veteran in military training. As Pershing suggests in his studies of the US Navy's hazing practice, even though it involves numerous brutal, ruthless elements during the process of initiation, members usually developed a sense of honor from what they had endured, hence consolidating their commitment to their assigned roles in the organization (Pershing, 2006). In my study, after the ritualistic process in the semester trial, all the suffering and bitterness they had experienced would become the inscription for their self-affirmation, and those who chose to quit became the contrast which further reinforced the positive perceptions of those who remained.

Second, it was through these intense disciplinary practices that the performing opportunity became a sacred duty, which for the juniors was a significant accomplishment after the long suffering and hard training. Especially in terms of playing instruments, the club's reward and punishment mechanism further shaped a particular kind of collective consciousness focused on hard training. On the one hand, the seniors' musical performance shaped the juniors' collective expectation for their future stage in the high school rock field, and motivated them to stay in the club to earn the future rewards. On the other hand, the seniors tended to make negative comments on the juniors' achievements, and this negativity called for a humble attitude and dedication to club activities. The juniors would never think that they played well enough. Therefore, endless practice would be perceived as the only way to be like their seniors. All the repertoires utilized by the seniors can be said to be the disciplinary repertoires to maximize the juniors' potential performance.

In this light, the ritualistic process in the KCRC semester trial functioned as the very rite of passage which marked the end of their recruit training. From the moment they joined the club, the juniors had experienced a process of "reinvention of the self" (Scott, 2011) through a series of conversions in terms of their interactional habit, values, and learning attitudes. They learned how to display their obedience through

particular physical movements and language, through which they recognized the seniors' authoritative status and accepted their own subordinated status. Consequently, they were disciplined to take their club seriously, as something they should dedicate themselves to, rather than a mere extra-curricular activity. After experiencing endless degrading treatments and disciplines and finally reaching the ritualistic process in this evening, they could eventually enter the next phase, where they could play in bands and were assigned with their first performing duty—to play in the opening act of the annual concert of their seniors. In such a process, all that they suffered gradually distanced them symbolically from the mundane pursuit of school success. Paradoxically, they attempted to manifest how “rock ‘n’ roll”-esque and rebellious they could be through these seemingly anti-rock repertoires. The essential function of these kinds of disciplinary mechanism and hierarchical relations, as one ex-member indicates, is to make their rock activity “not just an extra-curricular activity [to engage in] after their school work as with other regular high school clubs, but a serious kind of enterprise which entail members' committed attitude.” For the students, these repertoires effectively articulated a message that they would make sacrifices for excellence in their rock activities to such an extent. They functioned to produce a compelling mark of their collective passion, making their musical pursuit far more than an extra-curriculum activity, but a serious enterprise that could only be maintained through deep dedication and austere training.

Conclusion

Existing literatures of youth (sub)cultures tend to be interested in either the compatibility between the social background of the participants and the group's characteristics, or the specific patterns of organizational operation which function to keep the “right” members and knock out the “unfit” ones. I argue there is also a need to look at how some skeptical outsiders turn into committed participants, which allows us to illuminate the social mechanisms for members' identity transformation and self-reformation. Through a detailed analysis of the ethnographic detail in KCRC, my study shows that this would never be as smooth as just “screening out the right person.” It involves an intricate process in which the new recruits need to negotiate between their

original ways of life and the collective shared cultural norms and values in the group they have joined. A series of corresponding mechanisms for social punishment and reward are required, which operates to turn the outsiders—even those skeptical ones—into committed participants. It is through this socialization process that those mechanisms, which might appear unreasonable, and conflictual to the outside world, gradually become positive experiences for the would-be committed members. Therefore, while to outsiders the hazing rituals in the club seemed to be a type of brutal bullying, they operated as an effective means for the KCRC members to prove their strong commitment to their rock activity. At this level, the new members were not merely passive subjects to the disciplinary regime in the club, but exemplify what Susie Scott says about the willing agents who made an instrumental decision to submit themselves in exchange for the future reward (Scott, 2011). In other words, they voluntarily accept this regime despite the suffering, in order to strive for the opportunity to be the core agent of the club, hence being able to convert their daily effort into concrete reward and struggle for the position of “the best” in the field of high school rock. In what way, however, can they obtain such a position? How is “the best” defined and recognized? How does the reward mechanism operate in the field of high school rock? These questions will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 9

The Market of Inter-School Exchange: An Unequal Distributional System of Peer Recognition

In previous chapters, I illustrated how KCRC student members mobilize a series of unique subcultural repertoires to enhance their musical strength, in order to attain the status of “the best” in the field of high school rock. This chapter seeks to problematize this status by examining the reward mechanism in the high school rock subculture: how is such status socially recognized and what sorts of standards are involved in the process? What social conditions are favorable for the student members to struggle for this status? To what extent can the accumulation of recognized subcultural knowledge and skill account for the attainment of this status?

In her famous study of club cultures in Britain, Sarah Thornton develops the conception of subcultural capital, by appropriating Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital, to refer to the useful forms of subcultural objects and knowledge in the field of the club subculture (Thornton, 1995). Just like cultural capital, subcultural capital includes both tangible cultural objects, such as records and magazines, and embodied knowledge and skills (musical taste, for example). In her theoretical formulation, the possession of valued subcultural capital is the key to be distinguished from the other subcultural members and crucial for the acquisition of subcultural status. To a degree, this study agrees with the important role of subcultural capital in exploring the patterns of subcultural distinction; it somewhat illuminates the collective cult of instrumental virtuosity in KCRC. Nevertheless, my findings also suggest that the possession of valued subcultural capital alone is not sufficient; Thornton’s argument that the social value of recognized subcultural capital is mainly the consequence of the media construction (*ibid*: 116–62) can also be put into question. Her framework presumes a closed, self-contained sphere in which the rules of the game are irrelevant to the outside world; the circulation and the distributional structure of subcultural capital and social rewards are regulated by the operation of the “internal institutions,” such as the media and relevant industry and are thus unrelated to the wider patterns of social division. True, Thornton notes that the majority of the club scene participants are white, middle-class youth; however, due to her over-emphasis on the internal institutions, she fails to offer an account concerning the relationship between subcultural capital,

reward mechanism, and wider patterns of social division. Later in this chapter, I will demonstrate that wider patterns of social division also play significant roles in shaping subcultural meaning and the social value of particular subcultural capital. This argument is attained through an examination of the mechanism of social rewards—performance, reputation, and peer recognition, as well as how the subordinated group in the field interprets their participation—which are somewhat lacking in Thornton’s analysis. The findings suggest that young people from different social backgrounds face not only the unequal distribution of the opportunity to accumulate useful subcultural capital. In the distribution of the social rewards for subcultural participation, young people of higher social status are also in a favorable position for subcultural participation, marked by the possession of a greater amount of social capital and symbolic capital, which offers them more opportunities to be noticed and recognized, and more power to exert symbolic violence over other participants. As for the subordinated participants, adhering to the dominant subcultural value seem to be a way to resolve their social status problem outside the subcultural world, which in turn reinforces the existing subcultural hierarchy and power relation. Apart from the possession of the valued subcultural capital, the social status and the structural position of the subcultural members are also crucial to the shaping of the opportunity structure for them to struggle for subcultural rewards and status.

The Nature of the Stakes in the High School Rock Field: The Market of Peer Recognition

The core logic of the field of popular music production is mainly based on market transactions. This may include revenues acquired through record and ticket sales (Hirsch, 1990), fixed revenues of the in-house covers bands (Shuker, 2013), or the session musicians’ revenues made through studio recording (Peterson and White, 1979; 1981; Thomson, 2013). Along with these mechanisms, musicians pursue either economic gain or symbolic interest—such as a popular reputation—or both. In the field of high school rock, however, the major form of rewards earned by students through their musical activity is only defined by *peer reputation*.

In the trajectory of their life course, teenagers are poised at the phase marked by a strong need for peer recognition (Elder & Conger, 2000; Harris, 1995; Wu, 2005). Appearance, school performance, sexual attraction, and talent: all these are particular facets that teenagers are frequently eager to emphasize and compare with one another, by way of which each of them can perceive their own position among their peer groups, which closely relates to their identity formation. Concepts such as the “prom queen” or “head cheerleader” are the very manifestation of this sort of socio-psychological need. In a word, the extent to which one gains the attention of their peers greatly defines the sense of achievement perceived by students at this stage. In Taiwan, recent studies have shown club achievements largely dictate students’ sense of achievement (Ho, 2004; Lin, 2010). Particularly in elite high schools, students value their club achievements even more than academic performance (Cui, 2012).

In the field of high school rock, students strive to be the accomplished student musician and the one who is frequently noticed and discussed in terms of their playing techniques. This collectively shared goal directs the way students manage to enhance their musical prowess; by way of advancement in playing ability and the accumulation of instrumental virtuosity, students can thus build on their achievements and form their self-identity by being noticed, discussed and adored by other peers. The accumulation of playing ability—as valued subcultural capital in the field of high school rock—is undoubtedly of extreme importance. However, solitary practice won’t bring students any substantial attention and public recognition. This can only be earned through the recognition made by their peers in a similar sphere of activity; this echoes Hodgkinson’s emphasis on the necessity of the existence of a “subcultural audience” for the Goth participants to realize potential subcultural capital (Hodgkinson, 2002: 92). As described below, students need to gain recognition through public performance, so that their daily, private, efforts are rewarded with an enhanced reputation.

The Conversion of Daily Effort into Reputation: Audience Mobilization

The size of their audience, most of whom are students of rock clubs from other schools drawn to the club event, is the main reference for rock club musicians to assess their reputation—particularly in terms of how many audience members remain for the entire

gig, which is often more than three hours long. In Taiwanese society, under the particular social atmosphere marked by the extreme emphasis on exams and academic promotion, students' daily time schedules often need to be negotiated between school courses, school clubs, cram schools, and family time. Thus, for rock club members, the main problematic issue of their collective activity is how to mobilize as many members of other schools' clubs as possible—that is, to attract students from other schools who are willing to spend their precious after-school hours attending the club event. In other words, in this context, the after-school hours of students from other schools are therefore the targeted resources for the members of any rock club to mobilize. The achievement in audience mobilization—the size of the audience—is thus treated as the principle measurement of club achievement.

First Premise: Musical Strength

The mutual comparison of playing techniques is the main focus in Taiwan's high school students' rock practices. "Musical strength," defined as the ability to perform with instrumental virtuosity, is one of the fundamental premises of whether the rock club's gig can attract peers from other schools. Student musicians strive to achieve the state of being able to play instruments "far beyond the standard of high school students," by displaying particular playing techniques and musical repertoires which can only be performed by only a few musicians. With this collective tendency, the most common method for students to attract peers from other schools is to choose songs marked by a high technical threshold as the main focus of their musical event. When participating in gigs organized by other schools, musical strength and playing techniques are the central foci of students' technical gaze, particularly in terms of similar techniques or musical repertoires which they are all practicing at the same time. Most importantly, by paying extra attention to the playing techniques demonstrated by the students from other schools, the audience can assess their own musical strength and then perceive their possible position in the field. In general, a club whose members give a strong musical performance can offer not only a better audio and visual experience to the audience, but also a better platform for technical comparison, thus making it much more worthwhile for students from other schools to attend.

Solid musical strength is surely a necessary premise for audience mobilization. However, without an already established club reputation, club members don't yet know whether their musical events are worth being watched and compared with other clubs, even if members have acquired outstanding performance skills. In fact, even for members of more renowned clubs, there is still a need for them to work on audience mobilization by promoting their coming events. At this point, public relations (PR) management with similar clubs from other schools is another significant practice to achieve this end.

PR management is one significant aspect of operation in the inter-school rock field, which in this social universe refers to an act of making and maintaining connections with rock clubs of other schools. Every school's rock club has one or two individuals specifically assigned to PR among the second-year students. Event attendance and audience mobilization are the core duties of the PR person. As long as there is any event organized by other rock clubs, the PR person's duty is to represent their club at other schools' events, or even to mobilize their members to collectively attend the event as a supportive gesture.

As already mentioned, in every semester year, each club would have at least three to five public events. Most clubs manage to avoid "schedule conflict" to maximize audience mobilization. Under these circumstances, nearly every other week, there would be at least one public event organized by different schools in each semester. For each club, these events represent not only platforms on which they can observe and compare their playing skills with the event-host members, but also significant occasions in which they can build social networks with other clubs' members and publicize their future events to one another.

Making friends is the first step in PR management, and the ostensibly non-commercial feature of high school rock makes the students' friendship seem more genuine and facilitates inter-school exchange among students from different schools. Before the rapid development of diverse forms of Internet social media—MSN, Twitter, and Facebook, for example—students made their own business cards to exchange with each other at different musical events. Posting invitation cards to different schools was also a common way to advertise their events. With the growing

popularity of online social media—Facebook in particular—adding friends on the Internet and management of the “Fans’ Group” have become common methods of PR management. However, the Internet is no match for the most important form of PR practice: mobilizing club members to attend events organized by other schools’ clubs.



Figure 9.1 Gig poster for Taipei Girls’ High School Rock Club

The practice of member mobilization in PR management in the field is comparable to Mauss’s gift exchange, which is ostensibly based on reciprocal exchange as a manifestation of mutual friendship (Mauss, 1990). However, a friendship is not equal to an unconditional deed. To students, attending public events means spending valuable time that could be otherwise used in practicing their instruments or studying. Therefore, the host club is in the position of practically owing a “debt” to the guest and is expected to return this “gift” by attending future events organized by the guests. This is usually accompanied by a common ritual at every public event: the “PR moments.” PR moments usually take place at the halfway point of an event. At this point, the host first roll calls the school titles of every guest club. As each club is mentioned, its members collectively applaud in response to the roll calls and display their group momentum, both as a public acknowledgment that they

are a group with a large number of members, and as a hint to the host club for the future return of the gift. In the latter half of the PR moment, the host then helps to advertise the guest clubs' future events by reading the upcoming events' dates and venues.



Figure 9.2 Gig poster for KCRC

The practice of PR management in the high school rock world is marked by its reciprocal nature. While the PR person of school A, for example, mobilizes their members to attend the gig organized by school B, then next time, school B's PR person

will be expected to mobilize a similar “proportion” of members to attend school A’s gig. This, to a great degree, is analogous to the practice of the “Red Envelope”⁴⁴ in East Asian culture, that is, a current gift received is in fact an obliged debt requiring future return. WL, the former PR of the CKHM, commented on their practice of PR management:

It is a mutually beneficial form of inter-school exchange, a particular kind of economic activity. Each time we had our gig, we would have an attendance record book⁴⁵ to record the number of members from each school, then we’d need to conduct the act of repaying these gifts ... I remember one time we were very much impressed by a school from Pingtung!⁴⁶ They took a 7-hour train to Taipei to attend our annual gig, and at the moment our junior members told us there was a school from Pingtung, we were all shocked, you know? During the gig, we made an extra effort to send our greetings to them in person as a gesture to express

⁴⁴ The Red Envelope is a particular type of monetary gift common in weddings, the birth of a baby, and the Chinese New Year holidays in Mandarin-speaking societies. As a tradition marked by reciprocal gifting (pretty much similar to the usual patterns of Christmas gift exchange), although relevant rituals are often conducted through disinterested, non-calculative disguises (“it does not matter whether or not I get a cheaper gift in return”), there are usually practical considerations behind the ostensibly generous gestures. The most common case would be red-envelope gifting in weddings. While catering would be served at the wedding, the red envelope represents the mix of the cost of catering for and the extra monetary gift given by each guest. In general, there has long been several versions of price lists concerning the closeness between the giver and the receiver. For example, the common pricing of a red envelope for a not-very-close friend is usually NT 1,600 (around GB£30–35), whereas a fair pricing for a close friend would usually be more than NT 3,500 (around GB£70). On the other hand, the reciprocity in pricing also needs to be taken into account. For example, once A gives B a red envelope including more than NT 3,000 as a wedding gift, in the next future event held by A, the pricing of B’s red-envelope for A should be at least close to, or even more than, NT 3,000. Otherwise, it will be an obvious discourtesy.

⁴⁵ This is very similar to the attendance record book at weddings, of which the records would be very useful for the host to return the favor to the guest in the future.

⁴⁶ A city located in the southern Taiwan about 230 miles from Taipei.

our gratitude. Afterwards, we ordered our junior members to see if there was any opportunity for them to go to Pingtung and attend their gig, as a gesture to return this gift.

To summarize, it is a specific pattern of group exchange marked by indefinite circulation and accumulation: once school A mobilized a certain proportion of members to attend school B's gig, the next time, the latter will be obliged to repay with a similar proportion of members to school A. The core difference between the inter-school relations and the commercial transaction is that the former is ostensibly based on the core idea of "friendship," whereas the latter is based on commercial interest.

The practice of PR mobilization can be operated not only in the form of a gift, but also, through subtle manipulation, it can be utilized as a form of punishment or revenge. JH, the former leader of DT high school's rock club,⁴⁷ recalls how they tried to take revenge on a school that did not show proper respect to them, through manipulation of member mobilization:

... we used to have a good relation with C school; we had co-organized inter-schools event together. At that event, their members very passionately reacted to our performance and made us look really good on stage. In person, their former leader and I used to be good friends. Once I promised him that I would mobilize a lot of our members to attend their annual gig, and that was a big, a very huge gift to them. I mobilized more than 30 people from our club. We sat at the audience zone in the concert hall. People could see there was an area in which there was a bunch of students wearing the uniform of our school which looked quite splendid. However, when it came to half time, you know that in the high school tradition at this moment the host would usually speak grateful words to the participant schools; however, they did not mention our school. We did not know why, maybe they forgot or something, but we still felt deeply insulted. After some discussion with other leaders of our club, we decided to take revenge: we led all our members, you know, more than 30 people, to directly stand up and

⁴⁷ A municipal high school ranked between fifth to tenth in Taipei.

leave the concert hall while they were playing the first song of the second half, to insult them back, kind of like a gesture that we did not give a fuck about their shitty performance. In short, the public relations mobilization can be a gift in mutual exchange, but it can also be used as a punishment or revenge, and it was very useful. Afterwards, when it was our turn to have our annual gig, they mobilized the majority of their members to our event as a gesture of compensation.

In the field of high school rock, the pattern of gift exchange in PR management not only functions to enhance the number of audience members attracted to the musical event of each high school's rock club, but also contributes to the flourishing of musical activities in the high school rock field. With the intermediary of the inter-school PR management, individual members would be more inclined to spend their time attending the musical events organized by other schools when facing the conflict in time management among school courses, cram schools, and club activities; at a collective level, this system effectively facilitates the thriving energy of the operation of the high school rock field, and guarantees a certain number of audience members for the gig organized by different schools. In effect, it has created a pool of temporal recourse, in which everyone plays double roles: a performer seeking exposure in front of an audience who are also performers, and a potential audience for others to mobilize.

Dynamics in the Field: School Rank and the Gap in Audience Mobilization

For students, there seems to be only two ways to enhance audience mobilization: one is to practice diligently to enhance collective musical strength, and the other is to create and maintain social connections with other clubs. Each condition plays a different role in audience mobilization: a club's overall musical strength is the basic premise to earning a good reputation, while rich social connections can further facilitate the accumulation of reputation for those who are already playing well. In contrast, when a club's members perform terribly in front of a very large audience, this decreases their reputation and detrimentally affects audience mobilization for their future event, leading to the loss of both future audiences and alliances with other clubs.

These conditions can be seen as the concrete directions towards which students can invest their time and energy in improving inter-school exchange and audience mobilization. That is to say, they are what can be improved by effort—networking and the accumulation of subcultural capital. In the fieldwork, however, there is one recurring theme concerning irreciprocal exchange between students from schools of different academic rank. Students from non-elite high schools' rock clubs often grumble about the hierarchical differences in inter-school exchanges. As WJ, a leader of BQ high school's rock club, mentions:

WJ: I tell you what—the PR practice in the high school rock circle is in fact very hierarchical.

Researcher: Please go ahead.

WJ: It is like the six-school alliance represents the first level, which is followed by the SNT alliance, then the YBN alliance, and the last is the PFCH alliance.

Research: Can you please explain me how such a hierarchy works in the inter-school exchange between different schools?

WJ: Schools at the second level, SNT, their student members barely interact with students from the lower level, like students from the PFCH alliance. However, the student members of the lower level will actively make contact with the students of the higher level. Like the members in our club⁴⁸ often actively make contact with student members of the Six, but the latter barely initiate contact with us.

On the other hand, JH, a former leader of DT rock club, also illustrates a similar pattern in audience mobilization among schools of different academic ranks:

There should be no exception that, as far as school rank is concerned, the better the rank of the school, the more excellent its rock club and street dance club are. I've attended the gigs organized by almost every school in the greater Taipei region. I am not kidding, from KC, all the schools in Taipei, to even schools in Keelung, because I really enjoyed watching gigs. From the many gigs I have attended, I found there is a clear pattern. That is, students of better-ranked high

⁴⁸ BQ high school rock club is a member club of the YBN alliance.

schools would normally not attend the gigs organized by students of lower-ranked schools. However, gigs organized by better-ranked high schools would usually be better attended by more students from a wider rank of schools.



Figure 9.3 KCRC's welcome gig



Figure 9.4 The inter-school gig organized by the lower-ranked high schools



Figure 9.5 The inter-school gig organized by the elite high schools (including KCRC)

Many private instrument teachers in the music shops also noticed this phenomenon. To them, the degree of diligence in practicing and thereby the accompanying musical strength might be the keys to the difference. Mrs. Lin, the owner of the largest private musical instructional institution in Taipei, considers the existence of the senior/junior relation as the key factor for the more renowned status of the elite high schools' rock clubs:

... their senior/junior relation does provide a better institutional environment for students to learn instruments. The senior members would carefully watch the junior members, so the junior members would concentrate on practicing. In some schools, the senior members don't care about their juniors at all, so their musical strength is generally weaker. The event organized by the elite high schools can therefore always attract a lot more students because the quality of their performance is much better.

Mr. Wei, who is the owner and also a guitar teacher in Fuzz State Music shop, comments on the status of KCRC in the high school rock field:

... you'll soon find out the gigs organized by KCRC can always attract many schools, regardless of whether they are well-ranked high schools or lower-ranked high schools. Everybody (meaning high school students) wants to watch their performance and wants to learn from them. I've had many students from lower-ranked high schools wanting to imitate KCRC's musical practice, and they wanted to choose harder songs to practice, like KCRC's students do, but they just cannot play as well as them, and I always advise them to go for easier covers ...

The most prominent case is KCRC's annual welcome gig. The welcome gig is a common event in the world of high school clubs in the first half of every first semester in the academic year, and includes rock, guitar, pop music, hip hop, drama, and other clubs involving stage performance. The event's main purpose is to welcome the freshmen and introduce them to the clubs. To prevent date clashes between the different schools' events, students gather information on the dates of the other schools'

events as early as possible, in order to pick the best date in advance. With such a collective arrangement, for a long time KCRC's welcome gig has always been held two weeks after the school opening day, the earliest among all the schools. Due to KCRC's elevated status as the best in musical strength among all the high schools, it has already accumulated fame and made all the rock clubs of other schools treat their welcome gig as the greatest high school rock event. It is, according to the interviewees of non-elite high schools, "the grand event in the field of high school rock that, from year to year, every member in the club must attend." For the senior members from other schools, this is not only the event in which they can observe KCRC members' outstanding performance, but also the best opportunity for the newly joined junior members of each school to perceive the "greatness" of high school rock by witnessing the large audience—so the new members can visualize playing in front of such a large audience, as well as observing the degree of virtuosity in the field. Moreover, the KCRC welcome event also offers the perfect model of "how a high school rock club should run" to many other clubs by showing both the club's outstanding musical performance and specific organizational arrangements. The former leader of the rock club of a middle-ranked high school, SC high school, illustrates how shocked he was by the depth of serious commitment he witnessed in KCRC's welcome gig:

... let me put it in this way, for a community high school like ours, our club activity is not as sincere and strict as them, and there is no strict relation between the seniors and the junior in our school. I was very shocked by the situation that, even when we walked by the junior members of KCRC in the event, they did bow to us, and they even bowed to our junior members. And if they failed to do so, they were seriously scolded by their senior members. This is definitely one major reason that we wanted to attend their event, which made us feel that, Jesus, you know that club activities are just extracurricular activities in the eyes of parents and teachers, but they can manage their club activity to such a serious extent.

Apart from these, of course, given the rationale of gift exchange in audience mobilization, actively mobilizing members to attend KCRC's annual gig also represents an obvious act to "present" the gift to KCRC, which implies a friendly gesture to the host club, and also, most importantly, an expectation of the possible

return of the gift made by KCRC in the future—that is, the participation of KCRC’s members in their own event. However, KCRC would not, and is not able to, return to all the different schools’ clubs which attend their event. “The degree of closeness in friendship” and “strength in playing techniques and performing quality,” according to Lin Yuting, a former PR person for KCRC, are two key principles in the arrangement of mobilization strategies:

... of course, for gigs organized by better-ranked schools, which are also musically competent schools, all members of our club need to be in attendance, including both senior and junior members. As for the gigs organized by middle-ranked high schools, normally it would be the duty of the PR persons, and we would not mobilize our junior members; but if they play really well, then we would instruct our juniors to go, and the senior members would be willing to go even without being mobilized. For example, in our second year, DT high school was quite good and almost all of us attended every one of their gigs. As for other middle-ranked high schools, we would share the participation duties, like this time I attended the gig of school A, then next time it’d be the other PR’s turn to attend the gig organized by school B.

As already stated in Chapters 7 and 8, a series of arrangements and learning patterns are developed and adopted by KCRC students as substantial strategies to strengthen their musical competence (including the senior-junior relation, the hazing rituals, rote learning practices, musical cram-schooling, and so forth), which are understood as the keys to maintain the club’s leading status. Therefore, for KCRC members, outstanding musical performance and mastery in playing techniques are perceived as the signature feature of the club, making students from other schools willing to attend their gigs. In this club, the parameter of “musical strength” is a naturalized criterion concerning attendance of the other schools’ gigs. In other words, it is collectively believed in KCRC that, apart from the long-established historical connection between their school and other schools of close academic rank or historical status, the reason they are inclined to interact more with schools of close academic status is more because the latter are also clubs with better musical strength, in which it’s worth investing their time. As for the rock clubs of the lower-ranked schools, apart

from a few which are publicly recognized as musically competent, most do not have proper playing techniques, so KCRC members do not need (to quote a KCRC informant) to “waste their precious time which can be otherwise used in cram schooling or revising.” With this rationale, members of lower-ranked high schools’ active attendance at KCRC gigs is understood as merely being due to collective admiration for KCRC’s musical reputation and is hence taken for granted. Therefore, KCRC’s “inability” to return the gift to the lower-ranked high schools can thus be legitimized by musical strength and playing ability.

However, the elite high schools’ superior musical strength is not merely a subjective perception shared by those elite high school members. The members of non-elite high schools’ rock clubs also recognize the gap in the quality of musical performances between the elites and the non-elites. In particular, they are aware that the types of the songs copied by the elite schools’ members are generally more difficult and challenging, such as the songs of Dream Theater, Steve Vai, Victor Wooten, or Marcus Miller.

The already established reputation of the elite schools’ musical strength is undoubtedly one of the significant factors that attracts members of non-elite schools to mobilize their members to attend the elites’ gigs. As earlier stated, student clubs of elite high schools have long enjoyed better structural conditions. On the one hand, they have all long enjoyed better-equipped learning environments and much more leeway in pursuing non-academic achievements, which have brought them more time and space in accumulating instrumental virtuosity. In particular, since the clubs of the traditional top three boys’ high schools—KCRC, HSNUGC, and CGRC—are earlier entrants in the field of high school rock, they have long taken the dominant positions which endows them with symbolic power defining the legitimate mode of musical operation in this field. Members of many non-elite school rock clubs treat the gigs organized by the elite schools as important events in the entire high school rock circle: non-elite school members attend to discover the possible reasons and arrangements that enable elite schools’ students to be the best, even in the sphere of “playing.” The former leader of SC High School’s rock club illustrates why he always mobilized their members to attend KCRC’s gigs:

... it is partly because, since I'd joined the rock club, it had long been a recurring theme that KCRC is the best. I've heard this over and over again. Either it was heard from our seniors or from the students of other schools. In particular, I'd heard they have a much better system of both instruction and performance arrangement. Compared to them, I deeply feel the student clubs of community high schools like us, frankly speaking, are not committed enough, which conforms very much to the definition by our parents and teachers of student clubs as mere relaxation after studying. Most of the members really don't know what they are doing in the club. From this point, I do envy that [KCRC] already have a sound system of learning and playing inherited from generation to generation.

Watching elite school students' musical performances is the most direct way for other students to discern their musical competence: with the playing skills and techniques they have learnt, they can more or less perceive the gap in musical strength between each other. People who sincerely want to devote themselves to musical activities know only by comparing themselves with the elite high school students' performance can they make a proper self-assessment and perceive where they are in the field of high school rock. This has brought non-elite students into an ambivalent situation: while watching the elite school students' performance, non-elites can objectively assess their own musical strength, whereas in the elite gigs, it is only by means of the attendance and recognition of the non-elites that the elites can acquire the most honorable achievement. Under these circumstances, there is an obvious discrepancy in each other's *demand* for the attendance of the other. For the elite school rock clubs, their major concern is whether their gig is well attended; apart from the presence of members of other elite high schools, they do not really need the presence of non-elite students to recognize their achievement. For non-elite students, however, the highest perceived achievement in this field can only be attained through the recognition of elite school members; to attract the attendance of elite students, non-elite students can only follow the rules of the games in playing rock as defined by the elites, that is, to follow the "right" kind of musical operation and taste marked by the emphasis on instrumental virtuosity. As the former leader of NH high school rock club, which is academically ranked between fifth and tenth in Taipei, recalls:

Before we begin to practice our instrument, we'd already treated the rock clubs of elite high schools as the major reference. So, of course, it turned out we wanted more than to be as good as them, we wanted to make them be willing to come to our gig because we are as good as them ... I started to feel confident in earning their recognition in one of our gigs in the beginning of my second semester year. In the gig, I would observe the audience response to our performance, and I did particularly observe the response of the students of elite high schools, and I found they quite enjoyed our performance.

The Hidden Factor: The Social Alchemy of the “School Title”

For non-elite high school students, “the probability of the elite high school students’ attendance” has long been one significant goal in their future expectation of the achievement made through their daily instrument practice. In particular, for newly established clubs which have not yet earned proper recognition, the highest achievement they may reach is to attract elite high school students to their gig to “certify” their performance. In other words, the attendance of elite high school students to their gig is by far the most efficient and desirable way to convert their daily effort into substantial rewards. This situation in part conforms to the conceptualization of “subcultural capital” in both Thornton’s and Hodkinson’s studies: the possession of higher amount of recognized subcultural capital allows the agent to have more opportunity to accumulate friendship and develop connection with other participants in the subcultural field (Hodkinson, 2002; Thornton, 1995). In my own view, however, solely relying on the conception of valued subcultural capital may not supply a sufficient explanation, as it may lead to neglecting just *how* the subordinated group interprets the meaning of their subcultural participation. Just as the social value of recognized cultural capital is usually the very product of the unequal power relation—or, to use Bourdieu’s concept, the result of the exertion of symbolic violence conducted by the dominant group (Bourdieu, 1991; 1993)—the value of useful subcultural capital may just reflect the (sub)cultural perspective of the dominant group which is imposed upon the whole subcultural field. Again, the aforementioned KCRC members’ interpretation of why students from non-elite high schools tend more to participate in

KCRC's gig rather than the other way round is the best example of this "dominant perspective": in their own view, it is "mainly" because their musical strength is greater than that of the non-elite students. As we shall see below, the social meaning and value of particular subcultural participation varies with the social background of the subculture's members, which puts into question the equation of the possession of recognized subcultural capital with the acquisition of subcultural status.

In my study, apart from musical recognition, the attendance of elite high school students at a gig organized by non-elite students can also bring about a particular social effect that is never achieved the other way around; that is, the effect of the "legitimization" of the rock activity in the eyes of musical outsiders—in particular parents, teachers, and school authorities—by non-elites being seen "playing together with elite high school students."

As already mentioned, Taiwan's local youth rock culture, the substantial operation of which is mainly realized through school clubs, is carried out through negotiation between students, parents, and teachers. The extent to which students can devote themselves to their rock activities depends on the extent their parents and teachers can "tolerate" their activities, or even actively provide support. At the majority of student gigs, not only would students be invited or mobilized to attend, but the performers' parents and teachers would also be invited to view the musicians' achievements—accomplishments which can be partially explained by the older generation's willingness to compromise and give way to their children's desire to spend valuable time on their rock activities.⁴⁹ Most students are fully aware that the daily efforts they have made in acquiring musical skills are probably not fully understood by their parents and teachers, given the obvious generation gap in musical tastes and cultural preferences. This is particularly so because rock had long been treated in Taiwan as a problematic, negative cultural form before the 1990s. However, compared to the content of their musical activities, consideration of "*who* they are playing music with" is the simplest and most direct way for parents and teachers to understand the students' activity. That is, for non-elite high school students, "the presence of elite high school students at the non-elites' gig" is what can "legitimize"

⁴⁹ Normally teachers and parents would be arranged to sit at the front rows of the venue for the host students to show their respect and gratitude.

their rock activity, especially given this cultural form had long been rejected by their parents' and teachers' generation. PY high school is an upper middle-ranked high school in Taipei; its rock club's former leader Wu and the club's former PR person C. Lee illustrate how the presence of a substantial number of elite school students at their event was useful for them in impressing their teachers and parents:

Wu: What we aimed to do was to get ourselves recognized by the elite high school students, to be part of the inter-school exchange game.

C. Lee: In fact, it was like a kind of idea that "we can also achieve what they can achieve." And at the time, we'd changed the way many parents and teachers saw us. At first, the school authority did not allow us to organize our gig, and we'd had a serious confrontation with the school and eventually we did it without the proper support of our school. However, on that day, all the seats reserved for our teachers were full, and their seats were surrounded by students from KC high school and TFG high school, you know, they always wear their distinctive uniforms for this kind of occasion. After that, our teachers did change their attitude towards our activity and did start to treat us in a more positive way.

Wu: They could not imagine that we were able to develop connections with students of traditional elite high schools.

In my fieldwork, this state of mind is particularly obvious in the students of upper middle-ranked schools. In their subjective perception, they do not consider that they are academically inferior to the elite high school students. In interviews, many of them expressed a similar kind of regret that their ranking was due to some tiny or insignificant failure in the Basic Competence Test (BCT, see Chapter 3) that led them to miss out on the opportunity to attend the elite high schools—mishaps such as a calculation error, or some mistakes in the order of filling in response cards. However, the long-existing label of the "top three schools" is produced by the narrowly defined ranking system on the basis of the aggregate score of five subjects—Chinese Literature, English, Math, Natural Science, and Social Studies; this has long contributed to an extremely unequal system of symbolic and material distribution, even though the gap in the admission cut-off point between the so-called "top three" and the next "top three" has become less and less significant over the years. With the

“performative magic of the power of instituting,” in Bourdieu’s language, such differentiation “separates the last successful candidates from the first unsuccessful one, and institutes an essential difference between the officially recognized, guaranteed competence, and simple culture capital, which is constantly required to prove itself” (Bourdieu, 1986: 248). As already mentioned in Chapter 3, discrimination over academic record is the most prevalent type of social labeling, and commonly seen in parents’ expectations and teachers’ teaching practice. Under this circumstance, the disproportionate distribution of recognition produces a sense of *relative deprivation* (Gurr, 1970) for non-elite high school students. “I could have been one of them,” as one interviewee vividly states, is one of the most frequently recurring themes among upper middle-ranked students. Many of them had been highly ranked in their junior high schools and expected to gain admission to one of the top three high schools, but had failed to do so due to minor mistakes in the BCT. For these students, carrying out more club exchange activities with elite high schools is a common subcultural strategy for them to alleviate this collectively perceived sense of *relative deprivation* before entering university, and further bringing them substantial perception of *status promotion*.

JH, the former leader of DT high school’s rock club, nicely illustrates how school ranking matters in their rock activities:

Apart from musical strength, there is still one thing that really matters a lot, the school rank. We’d discussed this in our club activity when we were seeking the target for inter-school cooperation. There had long been a kind of idea deeply rooted in the mind of every Taiwanese person, that is, after you finish junior high school, you will then be assigned to a particular hierarchical position, and the uniform you wear represents which position you occupy in the hierarchy. With this idea, in any sphere of activity, you would be inclined to interact with a similar level or a better one. This idea exists not only in students’ minds. I remember there was one time our junior high school teacher gave us a talk; he said: “You can now decide what kind of person you want to be, because you’ll soon be facing the high school entrance exam. For example, if I am now on the tube and need some help for directions, and there is one student from KC high school and an unknown vocational school, I will definitely ask the KC student.” This has long

been a common idea, and it has affected us a lot. So when I was the leader of our club back in my high school days, I might not have fully believed in this idea, but to attract a larger audience to come to our musical event, I still tend to arrange more interactions with elite high school students.

For these students, subcultural participation means not only the pursuit of musical meaning and achievement, but also what Albert Cohen says about the subcultural solution to the societal status problem. In his classic study, *Delinquent Boys* (1955), he observed that subcultural participation was an avenue for disadvantaged youth to resolve their status problem in mainstream society. Therefore, apart from “musical strength,” there is one fundamental but under-recognized difference in the engagement in the club activity between elite students and non-elite students: the latter can never bring any “non-musical benefit” to the former through their attendance at an elite school gig as compared to what non-elites can bring to an elite gig. This creates a fundamental gap in their demand for each other’s presence which can never be achieved through “musical strength” and PR management. In here, Bourdieu’s “social capital” can be helpful in understanding this discrepancy. Social capital, according to Bourdieu:

... is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships or mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit ... it exerts a *multiplier effect* in his own right. The profits which accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible. (Bourdieu, 1986: 248–9)

Elite high school students’ social capital, acquired through success in the high school entrance exam, can be understood as the very root of the difference in their demand for each other’s attendance. Their “presence” is more needed by students of lower academic rank for the extra “profits.” Therefore, they pretty much conform to what Bourdieu goes on to say:

... the possessors of an inherited social capital, symbolized by a great name, are able to transform all circumstantial relationships into lasting connections. They are sought after for their social capital and, because they are well known, are worthy of being known (I know him well); they do not need to ‘make the acquaintance’ of all their ‘acquaintances’; they are known to more people than they know, and their work of sociability, when it is exerted, is highly productive. (Bourdieu, 1986: 250–51)

This quote illustrates the fundamental power inequality between elite students and non-elite students in many spheres of activities, including rock music, which is the very consequence of the difference in their school title. One of KCRC’s previous PR managers, Mr. K, mentions that the crucial difference is in their expectations for the audience: “We only care that the auditorium is full at our event, not who comes to it.” In the realms of either academic study or rock activity, elite high school students are already at the top. They simply do not need any specific peer group to recognize their accomplishment; all they need is a basically anonymous audience to fill up their venue.

Following this logic is the obvious difference in the value of “time” of students from different school ranks: in this system of interaction; elite school students’ attendance is far more significant than that of non-elite students, the value of the former’s time is thus far more valuable than the latter. That is to say, it would usually be enough for elite schools’ clubs to send fewer representatives, who carry the collectively shared social capital to the non-elite high schools’ events in exchange for more audience members from the latter. This can be viewed in parallel to the common ritual of any significant figure’s attendance at all sorts of public or private events—for example, an influential politician or celebrity at a festival—which brings acclaim and honor to the host. The former PR person of NH rock club—NH being a better-ranked non-elite high school—points directly to the naked truth of the game of event mobilization for the students of lower-ranked non-elite high schools:

It is an interesting phenomenon that the members of the lower-ranked high schools might easily feel satisfied, even if the elite high schools like KC or GC only send a PR person to their events. It was as if “look, KC’s PR person is here,

we are so honored!”—just one PR person is enough to represent the whole club in their events. This is particularly for the students of the lower-ranked schools, because their gigs can usually attract only students of similar academic level to attend. Once I attended the annual gig of KL girls’ high school. In general, it was quite unusual that a student from my school would attend the event organized by students of this sort of school, because we are academically out of their league. At the PR moment during the half time, as the stage host roll-called our school, we suddenly became the focus of attention in the venue, and the situation somehow made the students of KL girls high school feel honored. At the end of the venue, their members even came to us in person and kept saying thank you to us.

The Structure of Complicity: The Deceptive Nature of Gift Exchange in Inter-School Exchange

What we have illustrated here can be said to be an unequal system of mutual exchange in musical activities based on an exam-instituted hierarchy. For members of non-elite high schools, they are not fully unaware of the difference in the strategy of event mobilization between schools of different rank. In the majority of my interviews, non-elite students can more or less perceive the issues concerning school hierarchy in inter-school exchange: members of the lower-ranked high schools would always be more willing to mobilize members to attend the gigs of the better-ranked schools, even if they know it would become an investment of no substantial return. The rock club of DF high school, for example, a new community high school established in 2008, mobilized the majority of their members to the annual gig of CG rock club, as one of the CG members was the twin brother of one of the DF members. While this kinship brought CG rock club a significant gift from DF rock club, however, it did not bring a corresponding return to the latter:

Q: I noticed many members of your club attended the annual gig of the CG rock club in 2012, were you there?

DF Student: Of course, I still remember that event clearly.

Q: Why? Was it impressive to you?

DF Student: Because one student musician at CG rock club was the twin brother of one of our leaders, so we mobilized the majority of our members to their gig. And also, that club was very renowned for the musical strength of their members.

Q: Did they bring a lot of their members as a return to your annual gig?

DF Student: No, not really.

Q: Even if there is a twin brother of their member in your club? Don't you think it was a bit rude?

DF Student: In fact, we all know it's more about the issue of "educational class," because CG is a school with higher enrollment scores for the BCT result. It was as if, for example, now my best friend was a former member of TFG rock club, but I think even if we organize our annual gig again, the TFG rock club would not attend our gig because our club history is too short, and is musically much weaker than those traditional elite high schools.

This brings us to another question: since students know, on the one hand, that the hierarchical difference also contributes to the gap in audience size between schools of different rank, and on the other hand, it will most possibly be an investment of "low or no return," as it most possibly ends up with a situation with no members of elite high schools attending, then why would students of non-elite high schools still be willing to mobilize their members to attend the elite schools' gigs? To answer this question, we need to turn our focus to the specific pattern of gift exchange among different schools.

Offering the illusionary "possibility" of gift return, the pattern of gift exchange, of which the apparent thrust is based on selfless friendship, makes students from lower-ranked schools willing to invest their time in the events organized by elite high schools with substantial expectation of return on the other side. For non-elite students, on the one hand, enhancing musical strength by following the steps and musical tastes of students from the elite high schools is certainly one necessary premise to earn recognition from the latter. On the other hand, initiating event mobilization as a gift for the gig organized by elite high schools would be a strategy for non-elite students to reduce the gap created by the differences between them, in both the amount of social capital and the already established musical reputation. C. Lee, PY rock club's former PR person, recalled how he and his club mates endeavored to mobilize their members

to attend the annual gigs organized by elite high schools for the possibility of a return in the future:

In the year when I was the PR person, to connect with the members of the elite high schools, we practiced very, very hard, and watched a lot of gigs organized by them. We hoped our effort would be recognized by them, and of course, to prove we could be as good as them. So, as long as any club of an elite high school had a gig, we would mobilize many of our members to attend the event. I remember there was once when HSNU guitar club had their annual gig. They were very famous, you know, they have Mayday, and almost all the high school student musicians of every school would attend this event. So, I made a mobilization order to every member of our club. I did not care if any of our members needed to go to cram-school that evening, they just needed to “go to this event”! What I thought was, this time I initiate such a huge gift to them, [then] the next time when we have ours, at any rate they would somewhat be obliged to mobilize their members in return and our efforts could be seen by them.

In here, the initiation of audience mobilization works as a form of “*compulsory gifting*”—a form of gifting that the giver intentionally forces the other side to receive. It functions for the students of non-elite schools to expect the elite students to return the gift in the future, and hence to enhance the possibility of the acquisition of greater club reputation.

On the other hand, for elite students, the inter-school friendship accumulated through proper PR management is the means for the non-elite high school students to accept the unequal pattern of gift exchange, even though both sides are not even clearly aware of the impact brought by the gap in status—even when the former do not actually send any representative to the events of the latter. The friendship between KCRC’s former PR Winters Lin and the former PR of DA professional school best illustrates this:

WL: I don’t think the pattern of our inter-school exchange is entirely based on academic rank. I remember a few PRs from some other schools were quite friendly and passionate. And if they came to me and we had a great time together,

then the two clubs might be getting closer. For example, when I was the PR, the relationship between our club and the rock club of DA professional high school was quite close. Their PR was quite friendly and we had a lot to talk about.

Wang: Was that a he or she?

WL: That was a dude, in fact.

Wang: Did the members of their club come to your gigs?

WL: Yeah, they brought a lot people to our gigs.

Wang: So you also return a lot of people to their gigs?

WL: Actually no ... (laughing).

Wang: So you did not need to spend more effort to mobilize your members for their event?

WL: No, but we still contacted them in private, and we did chat a lot.

It is under the circumstance that the discourse of “friendship” is maintained as the public principle in the practices of inter-school exchange that the social universe of high school rock has become a field of mutual deception and complicity. The logic of gift exchange makes the demand of “making alliances with elite students” become seemingly possible for non-elite students; for them, as long as the gap in musical strength between them and elite students is reduced, the initiation of gift-exchange, by actively mobilizing a certain amount of members to the elite students’ events, would be the ideal strategy to reduce the gap in the amount of social capital between the two sides—that is, to let the elite students be “in debt” to them. On this basis, the attendance of elite students at the non-elite students’ gigs can not only help to valorize the value of the non-elite students’ performances, but also reduce the sense of relative deprivation collectively shared by the non-elite students that is the very consequence of the labeling effect induced by the high school entrance exam.

Concluding Remarks: A System of Double Consecration

Musical competence and school connections constitute two conditions in which a gray space of strategic action in the field unfolds. While neither of the two can alone determine the capacity for audience mobilization, both appear to be equally important

for students in mapping their strategy in the field of high school rock. Under the condition of musical strength, on the one hand, the accumulation of virtuosic playing techniques is a crucial way to attract students from other schools to attend musical events in order to compare playing techniques with the host club's members; given the principle of gift exchange threaded by the logic of reciprocal friendship in public relation management, mobilizing the members of the club to attend the events of other schools would be a strategy deployed in exchange for an expected future audience. Especially for non-elite school students, the more intensively they practice, the greater the need for them to mobilize their members to attend the events of the elite high schools in exchange for audiences in the future, to successfully convert their accumulated musical strength into substantial reward (that is, an enhanced reputation). The need to actively initiate gift exchange and the need for adherence to the dominant definition of musical competence thus become two mutually reinforcing requirements.

It can be concluded the highly valued status of instrumental virtuosity in the high school rock field in Taiwan can be seen as the very consequence of a historical process marked by double consecration—musical consecration and educational consecration. It first originated from the career structure of the field of popular music production from the 1980s to the late 1990s. During this period of time, musical standards, dominated by professional musicianship, were marked by excessive emphasis on instrument virtuosity along with the prioritized status of jazz and metal, which conform to the career requirements of live covers and studio sessions; these constituted the canonical principle of the instructional system. Via the instructional system, these standards were thus adopted by the emerging field of high school rock, and constituted the golden rules for students to learn to play rock instruments. Specifically, while learning from private tutors has become a necessary route for students to excel in playing instruments, certain rules and aesthetic principles in the professional field of popular music production were thus reproduced in the world of school clubs, in which those who had extra time and money to learn from a private tutor were thus more likely to take the dominant positions within the clubs. While it is a specific mode of musical operation requiring an investment of a vast amount of time and energy in pursuing precision, speed, and delicate manipulating skill via repetitive mimicking of existing works, elite high school students have gradually taken the dominant position due to the structural advantage brought by their schooling environment, which favors them

in the pursuit of extra-curricular achievements. Under these circumstances, their mastery of instrumental virtuosity has earned them the reputation of being “technically strong schools” in the field of high school rock.

Before 2000, the higher status of professional musicians, marked by the emphasis on playing techniques, could be seen as the source of exterior legitimacy for the cult of instrumental virtuosity in the high school rock field. This has later been followed by *the second mechanism of consecration*, that is, the social effect of the “school title” of the “strong clubs” which are the very product of the social division between differently ranked schools. This is especially obvious when instrumental virtuosity gradually lost its ultimate efficacy in the system of value judgment in the field of popular music production, due to the rise of original bands and the accompanying emphasis on creativity and originality (see Chapter 5). For KCRC students, genres marked by an emphasis on instrumental virtuosity, the most common being heavy metal and hard rock, are what *allow* them to compare themselves with one another in terms of technical proficiency on the basis of several *indices that are relatively more measurable and comparable*—the degree of precision and speed in particular. Conversely, in students’ collectively shared frame of musical knowledge and perception, which is shaped by learning to play canonical rock tunes and heavy genres, the alternative genres from the 1990s are understood as easy listening songs marked by a lack of playing techniques; the diverse aesthetic standards embraced by indie musicians make no sense to this frame of musical understanding. While these can be seen as the majority part of available musical repertoires in the “toolbox” of musical practice (Swidler, 1986), students have been more encouraged to “pick up” the virtuoso-oriented mode of musical repertoires to meet the requirement of *being the best*. This requirement is precisely the consequence brought about by the extra attention they have long attracted from students of non-elite high schools.

For elite high school students themselves, this is more of an outcome of the public acclamation their ex-members have accumulated through their outstanding musical performances, bringing them more opportunities to be the center of attention in the high school rock field, but also creating substantial limitations to their musical activities. To them, collective musical strength is understood as the fundamental reason for the gap between the attention received by them and the rock clubs of non-elite high schools. Via the point of view of the non-elite school students, however, we

soon find the logic of operation in the high school field is much more than this. Apart from musical strength, it is also the status gap between the elite students and the non-elite students that makes the demand of the latter to inter-exchange, with the former being much higher than vice versa. On the one hand, the school titles and the academic status of elite high school students can bring the benefit of legitimization to the rock activities organized by non-elite school students, particularly in regard to the perceptions and judgments of the latter's parents and teachers. On the other hand, while the sphere of subcultural activity has also been dominated by the students from the elite high schools, club activity is one possible sphere in which non-elite students might be able to compete on a more equal footing with elite students, at the stage of high school. By earning the attention and recognition of students from the elite high schools through displaying outstanding musical strength, the subjective "sense of deprivation," which is created by the symbolic violence in the school ranks based on arbitrary standards (that is, the forms of the test and the five main subjects) of school status for students of non-elite high schools can thus be "compensated."

Subcultural distinction, therefore, can never be fully explained by merely looking at the internal value and meaning of the possession of subcultural capital, as suggested by Thornton. The objective social position of the young people outside the subcultural world also plays a significant role in shaping the social meaning of their subcultural participation, hence intervening in the valorization of relevant subcultural capital and the shaping of the opportunity structure for subcultural status acquisition. Such logic can be easily identified in the social situation involving cross-cultural or cross-ethnic interaction. A frequently observed example would be that some people from a relatively more disadvantaged ethnic group may brag of, directly or obliquely, their connections with the ethnically advantaged group to their own group members only because they possess the kinds of (sub)cultural capital—listen to the same music, read the same novels, or follow the same sports—which are recognized by the latter group. (The other side of a similar phenomenon, for example, can be represented by the common discussion about "how to access western students' social circle" among Asian-international students studying in western societies.) Their social demand in developing connections with the advantaged group would in turn reinforce the status of both the members of the advantaged group, their (sub)cultural capital and ways of seeing and perceiving the world. In other words, subcultural participants from different

social backgrounds may have a “non-subcultural problem” which can be resolved—to twist CCCS’s idea of “subcultural solution”—by the possession of useful subcultural capital, of which the meaning and value would also be valorized by the relevant social mechanism outside the subcultural world.

Chapter 10

Conclusion: Subcultural Distinction in the Exam-Oriented Educational System

At the annual gig of the 24th KCRC, students played a cover of Alter Bridge's "Life Must Go On" as the final song of the event. For the KCRC members, this was the first time in their lives that they could strive for one goal mainly for themselves. It was what could best provide them with a substantial sense of accomplishment at this phase of their lives. As the song title suggested, however, their lives had to go on, even though this event was about to end.

In the middle of their song, all the members of the 24th KCRC came on the stage one after another, collectively singing the chorus. Near the end, the 24th deputy leader, Deng, one of the guitarists, suddenly stopped playing and laid his guitar down on the stage before the music had ended. After the performers all gathered around the mic at the center front of the stage, Deng said the following words to the audience: "Many thanks to all of you for staying for such a long time. Our annual gig has just finished, and we members of the 24th KCRC bow to all of you."

After this brief statement, each member took a turn in sharing their internal struggles with the audience during the two years of their engagement in the rock activities. They talked about how they "sacrificed" their academic responsibility to dedicate time to the club, while almost everyone thanked their parents for "tolerating" them spending so much time in club activities:

"I am so sorry, Mom!"

"Thanks to my parents for being so patient and allowing me to spend plenty of time to practice with my club mates."

"Mom, Dad, I need to confess to you. In the three months before the annual gig, I'd never been in my classroom and spent all of the time practicing."

Some were even crying as they expressed their gratitude for their parents' support—for instance, buying instruments for them—unlike the parents of a few

members who forbade their children from continuing to participate in club activities. After all these confessions, the club members collectively expressed their resolve that in the following year they would make up for their reduced academic performance: “We’ve just accomplished the most important thing in our lives. Next, we will push ourselves to study at National Taiwan University together!”

The post-gig speeches here can be said to be a rite of passage (Van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1969) through which the students’ role officially transforms from that of student musician to full-time candidate for university entrance exams—a transformation that will place them back on the right track towards being elite students: pursuing exam success and then a place in an elite university.

In the previous chapter, it was argued that the high social capital brought by the widely recognized elite school title created an opportunity for KCRC student members to gain a better reputation through their musical performance, and amplified their collective sense of accomplishment. In particular, the packed audience was evidence that allowed KCRC members to believe they were genuinely outstanding and talented musically, while student members of non-elite high schools might actually come to attend their events just for other non-musical reasons such as the benefits of interacting with elite high school students. However, it was this enlarged sense of accomplishment that led KCRC members to perceive their annual gig as the highest achievement that they had ever reached in their lives thus far, through the collectively shared school honor, the degree of attention they received, the number of audience members, and so forth.

They proved they could reach the top, which was beyond the reach of students of other schools in spheres other than academic studies and exams. In particular, their strong dedication and outstanding performance in rock activities allowed them to demonstrate they were more than the usually perceived image of elite students, who were just obedient to parental and school control, and cared only about exam results: they could even be “superior” and secure *subcultural distinction* in areas traditionally perceived as detrimental to the goals of elite students. Compared to those who were studying in the lower-ranked schools, KCRC members neglected more school courses, spent more time in leisure activities, and performed more strongly in playing rock instruments. Such subcultural superiority allowed them to feel they were also talented

in spheres which were not defined by the exam-oriented educational system, and further naturalized their collective shared sense of elite status and talent.

However, such a subcultural distinction would not be *completely* realized until they earned a place in an elite university: it needed to be “cashed in” through excellent university entrance exam results in the third year. For many of them, precisely because the former two years of high school study had been “sacrificed” for the pursuit of subcultural distinction, they thus needed to utilize all the most efficient methods of exam revision—intensive cram schooling, repetitive mock testing practice, and rote learning—at least twelve hours a day, seven days a week. Some of them even “jailed” themselves in the cram school all day every day, as the deputy leader Deng did right after the end of the annual gig,⁵⁰ focusing only on enhancement of his exam skills and the scope of the exam subjects. Consequentially, knowledge which would not be included in the exams was totally absent from their learning practice. That is to say, the more they distanced themselves from the educational requirements, by pursuing subcultural achievement in club activities during the first two years of study, the more instrumental and repetitive their academic learning would be in the last year; and thus, the deeper they were trapped in the exam-oriented educational system.

Their outstanding performance in rock music, and the seemingly rebellious repertoires that they adopted in the engagement of rock activities served an ideological function, allowing them to *believe* they had successfully marked themselves out from the traditional educational pattern. These repertoires were subcultural strategies for the KCRC members to negotiate their collective existence under the exam-oriented educational system at the symbolic level, and embodied elements of CCCS’s theoretical formulation of “symbolic resistance”. The patterns of their leisure engagement embodied their resistant reaction to the condition of existence that they were facing only at the symbolic level; the problems at the material and institutional level, however, still remained unresolved. The exam-oriented educational system,

⁵⁰ Deng was the club member who used to come to school every day with only his electric guitar, and he disappeared from most of the school courses during the second year’s second semester. The day after the annual concert, he then “jailed” himself in the cram school and took the “salvage courses” from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily during the two months of the 2012 summer vacation.

which was the main social mechanism that underlay the target—the educational control and social expectation from the parental generation—from which they aspired to escape, was instead revised and reproduced partly due to their subcultural dedication. This, ironically, further “reproduce[d] the gaps and discrepancies between real negotiations and symbolically displaced ‘resolutions’” (Clark et al., 2006: 35–37) In other words, their collective pursuit of excellence in instrumental virtuosity covered the gap between the more intensive rote-learning, linear ranking, the pressures of studying for exams and their dedication to leisure activity during the first two years.

They resisted the educational control at the symbolic level, and enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy over their time use in the leisure sphere. Ironically, they failed to recognize the essential logics of the exam-oriented educational system—linear ranking, hierarchization, and excessive competition—which were apparently embedded in the way they engaged in both their rock activities and their academic studies, and they were even willing to defend the exam-oriented system in the debates concerning educational reform; as is shown in Chapter 7, in these debates, their dedication and achievement in club activities were excuses for students to resist the non-exam promotion program.

In this light, student members’ engagement in subcultural activities can to some extent be analogous to the counter-school culture of the “lads” in Paul Willis’s *Learning to Labor*. On the one hand, all the rebellious repertoires mobilized by KCRC’s student members, and their strong dedication to and achievements made in their rock activities, somewhat served the function of “penetration,” which was “meant to designate impulses within a cultural form towards the penetration of the conditions of the existence of its members and their positions within the social whole” (Willis, 1977: 119). Through these subcultural activities, they not only resisted being the obedient subjects as presumed by the traditional educational system and parental and school control, but also actively articulated their campus culture and school identity with subcultural elements to construct their own symbolic world. On the other hand, there were still obvious “limitations” (ibid.: 119) to such penetration. As is shown above, the way they engaged in these activities also created an illusory perception for them to believe they were disengaged from the grip of the exam-oriented educational system, hindering them from recognizing the core logic in the operation of such a system: the mutual relation between excessive competition, rigid ranking system and

school hierarchization, which were in fact what drove them to actively dedicate themselves to subcultural and academic competition. This logic was closely intertwined with their sense of accomplishment in both subcultural and academic activities, and followed the process identified by Bourdieu whereby “agents well-adjusted to the game are possessed by the game and doubtless all the more so the better they master it” (Bourdieu, 1998: 79).

It was in this social dynamic that the student clubs in campuses expertly helped revise and hence reproduce the exam-oriented educational system. Through students’ engagement in club activities, the competitive rationale in the exam-oriented education was, on the one hand, vertically reproduced through the endless cycle of the schooling pattern marked by “playing in the first and the second year of studies and then full dedication to exam revision in the third year” from year to year, generation to generation. On the other hand, the competitive rationale was horizontally extended to the spheres of subcultural activities, as demonstrated by the way students engaged in “subcultural competition”.

Further Implications: Subcultural Distinction, the Relative Autonomy of Education in Shaping Cultural Distinction, and Exam-Oriented Education in Taiwan

The conclusion of this thesis aims to tease out three implications—both theoretical and practical—from this research. First, in spite of the criticisms that they have incurred since the 1980s with the rise of the so-called “post-subcultural debate,” the findings in this thesis suggests that the implications of Chicago and Birmingham versions of subculture still have contemporary relevance in the studies of youth culture and groupings. As I argue in Chapter 6, in Taiwanese society, most sites for young people’s leisure engagement have been integrated into campus life under the exam-oriented educational system. This feature made the post-subcultural emphasis upon cultural fluidity and fragmentation in contemporary youth cultures appear much less relevant to my research than the thematic issues proposed by traditional subcultural theorists such as collectivity, shared style and identity, and the intricate relationship between the social meaning of subcultural participant and members’ structural position.

In recent years, there have been more and more studies of youth cultures indicating the substantial limitation of post-subcultural theories in making sense of the cultural life of the majority of ordinary youth. These studies have argued that the theoretical tools developed from post-subcultural studies are relevant only to certain types of spectacular style which are exclusive to a few privileged young people; the patterns of subcultural participation of the wider category of “ordinary youth” and the significant role of wider patterns of social division are therefore overlooked (see, for example, Shildrick and MacDonald, 2006; Blackman, 2014).

However, these problems are not exclusive to post-subcultural studies. In Hodkinson’s studies of Goths and Thornton’s research on the British club cultures, the specific spectacular styles of the few are also the main cases from which their conceptual development are drawn. In my own view, however, the real problems in these studies are less to do with whether or not their conceptual development is based on specific spectacular cases than the ways these cases are examined. That is to say, these studies tend to focus on “internal social mechanisms,” such as “venues,” “events,” “the media,” and the collectively shared symbolic system through which the subculture’s members are grouped together. This methodological bias leads to a neglect of the broader, “ordinary” context for young people’s everyday life, such as the “street corner” in Shildrick and MacDonald’s studies (2006), or the school campuses in my case, and downplays the role of broader patterns of social division in shaping their subcultural participation.

This thesis supports the emphasis on the inseparable relationship between the shared symbolic system and the formation of collective subcultural identity presented in both Hodkinson’s and Thornton’s studies. A good example is my analysis of how the collective pursuit of profound musical knowledge and virtuosic skill, and the “supra-high-school-standard” musical accomplishment displayed in the public events, allowed KCRC members to perceive their musical activity as an almost professional activity, distinct from most youth leisure activities that were subject to the parental definition of extra-curricular activities. The findings in my research also suggest, however, that the relationship between stylistic distinctiveness and the forging of subcultural identity was just one of several dimensions in KCRC members’ subcultural engagement. Their collective cult of instrumental virtuosity and their musical preference in playing heavy metal covers were also embedded in a specific subcultural

milieu of the collective pursuit of dual excellence at both study and play, which was shared by students in a similar structural position in the educational field, i.e. the academic elite. In such a subcultural milieu, students strove for symbolic victory in the world of play by dedicating themselves to the pursuit of leisure achievement, in order to prove that they did not conform to the traditional expectation that they only needed to focus on success in the exam-oriented educational system. Seeking “rankable” musical achievement in playing rock instruments, therefore, can be best understood as the most effective way for KCRC members to struggle for autonomy from parental control, and to redefine the ideal image of the academic elite in this subcultural milieu: they could achieve what other students could not, even in the sphere usually perceived as opposed to academic learning.

Conceptually, such a subcultural milieu conforms to what Shildrick and MacDonald call “more generalized, loosely bounded and unlabelled forms of delinquent subculture” (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2006: 134). It connects several spectacular features in KCRC members’ musical style to a broader, more ordinary (sub)cultural context. This is analogous to the relationship between the counter-school culture and the wider working-class culture as depicted in Paul Willis’s *Learning to Labor*. In recent studies of youth (sub)cultures, the conceptualization of subculture at this level is relatively marginalized due to a commonly seen emphasis on the spectacular aspects as stated above—including both distinctive styles and internal mechanisms. In my own view, these studies tend to adopt an inflexible framework to interpret a traditional theorization of subculture. They downplay the dimensions which might to a certain extent still be relevant to the cases in their studies, so as to highlight or even exaggerate the significance of the elements which are in conflict with CCCS’s subcultural theory. The aforementioned neglect of the patterns of social division in Hodkinson’s and Thornton’s research is an example of this problem. Connecting the spectacular elements to the ordinary context and wider patterns of social division is helpful for illuminating broader social implications. It allows us to examine how subcultural distinctiveness relates to the wider social lives of the subcultural members, to dig deep into the structural root of this uniqueness, rather than just treating it as a distinctive social unit which seems to be isolated from the rest of society.

This thesis does not seek a return to the conceptualization of subcultures as proposed by the CCCS; nor do I suggest that their frameworks can be applied to my

case uncritically. A very obvious difference in my case is the subjects of study. From the Chicago School to Birmingham's CCCS, it can be argued that most subcultural studies mainly focus on the cultural response of the peripheral or subordinate group. Particularly in the Gramscian Marxist-inspired CCCS's perspective, the ritualistic resistance of working-class youth to structural transformation has almost become the equivalent of the term "subculture." The research subjects of this thesis, however, are the very opposite of peripheral groups: they were students at the most elite high schools in Taiwan, the winners in the notoriously exam-oriented educational system. The characteristics of their social position—their possession of a higher amount of social capital and exam capital—allow me to reveal a unique valence in youth subcultures which is very different from the aforementioned approaches to "problem-solving" or "symbolic resistance". That is, these elite students can further acquire symbolic profit through rejecting the dominant educational values, so as to be distinguished from other students (including both ordinary elite students and non-elite students), and securing subcultural distinction. The subcultural engagement of deprived youth might easily be stigmatized by the control culture in the rest of the society as depicted in Chicago or Birmingham's version of subcultural studies. In my case, KCRC members can instead acquire symbolic benefit and secure subcultural distinction in both the subcultural world and the wider social context—that is, they can acquire a reputation for being autonomous, versatile—through their pursuit of leisure achievement which is commonly perceived as opposed to the mainstream value.

In this sense, they can be seen to be what Paulo Freire calls "sub-oppressors" (Freire, 1970) who inflict "horizontal symbolic violence" (to give a slight twist to Bourdieu's symbolic violence) on their peers, while at the same time facing the social expectations produced by the exam-oriented educational system. As I argued in Chapter 7, in facing the exam-oriented educational system marked by the emphasis on excessive competition, ranking, standardized and de-individualized learning pattern, the elite students suffered just as much as other students do, and therefore aspired to mobilize a series of rebellious repertoires to struggle for autonomy. On the other hand, pursuing near-professional achievement in the leisure sphere allowed them to break away from the label of "study nerd" and to obtain autonomy, distinguishing themselves from both ordinary academically elite and non-elite youth. That is to say, compared to the ordinary academically elite youth, KCRC members can obtain the reputation of

being versatile through leisure achievement. On the other hand, non-elite youth cannot obtain a similar reputation through leisure achievement as they lacked socially recognized capital to legitimate their subcultural accomplishment.

In such an intersectional situation, their subcultural activities bear two seemingly mutually contradictory qualities at different levels, and resonate with the many-layered nature of subcultural resistance as suggested by Ross Haenfler (2004, 2014). In this case, the first level is struggling for control over the use of their time in the face of the authoritative definition of what they ought to do, instead of conforming to the usually perceived image of the nerdy straight-A students. At another level, by virtue of their position as the most elite students among all the high school students, they can “exploit the hierarchy between the elite and non-elites to their benefit in the very process of reaffirming it” (Thompson, 1991: 19). This is done through negating the traditionally expected qualities of elite students. And yet they exert symbolic violence by imposing the hegemonic definition and ideal image of “cool” high school kids on the other students. In other words, the proposed framework here does not just take the face value of the act which contains the elements of subcultural resistance, but also looks at the symbolic efficacy accrued through what Bourdieu calls “symbolic negation” to the dominant value. At this point, it examines how the structural position in the rest of the society of the subcultural participants endows them with specific social rewards, encouraging them to engage in specific patterns of subcultural engagement. This allows us to understand not only why specific subcultural repertoires would be more recognized and accepted than others by relevant groups in a particular context, but also how similar kinds of subcultural engagement incur different social consequences to subcultural participants of different structural position—that is, to see why some young people have more chances to acquire social reward through their subcultural engagement while others do not. One prominent example is that, in Taiwan, the rock bands which are formed by club members from an academically elite background were always labeled as “excellent at both study and play” by the mainstream media.⁵¹ Such

⁵¹ Just before I finished writing this thesis, there was another newspaper story about the release of the new album of a local rock band “White Eyes”, whose members are graduates and drop-outs from the elite universities in Taiwan, with the headline “The Highly Educated Punk Hipsters Are So Good at Playing” (Lin, 2017).

an extra benefit is only exclusive to the groups with the better academic record, while the academically inferior youth can never secure this particular kind of subcultural distinction.

This is not the first theoretical attempt, of course, to borrow Bourdieu's conceptual tools to rediscover subcultural phenomena. In her theoretically innovative book *Club Cultures*, Sarah Thornton opened a theoretical route in adapting Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital to illuminate the culturally stratified nature of club culture and explore the theoretical implications for studying the patterns of distinction in subcultural activities. Prima facie, the proposed theoretical formulation here in some ways resembles elements in Thornton's analysis of subcultural capital. Yet there is one critical difference between the proposed model here and Thornton's framework. In her studies, the useful value of subcultural capital and the benefits accrued from securing subcultural distinction are mainly confined within the subcultural field, which can be termed *internal subcultural distinction*. The proposed framework here extends the social implication of subcultural distinction to the wider society, which enables an analysis of the social conditions under which the "internally" recognized capacity and achievement within the subcultural world can accrue "external" benefits to its subcultural participants.

This is not to say that Thornton's internal subcultural distinction is irrelevant to my analysis. As already stated in Chapter 7, KCRC members' collective cult of instrumental virtuosity somewhat resonates with her conceptualization of subcultural capital. However, the neglect of the roles of specific patterns of social division in shaping the social meaning of subcultural participation limits her conceptualization of subcultural capital and distinction. As I indicated in Chapter 9, Thornton's subcultural distinction is predisposed to the possession of recognized subcultural capital, while the valorization of certain types of subcultural repertoires as valuable subcultural capital is determined by the operation of the media and cultural industry. In my view, this reasoning only reflects the dominant perspective of what can be recognized as legitimate subcultural capital, hence naturalizing the existing subcultural hierarchy. Thornton ignores the fact that the dominant social actors are usually in a social position which endows them with more power and useful resources—in both material and symbolic forms—to validate the pattern of their subcultural participation and perspective as the universalized doctrine, and to then impose their definition on social

actors in different social positions. The findings in my research suggest that the acquisition of social reward and status in the subcultural field is also mediated by the structural conditions that subcultural participants are facing in the rest of society. By examining the subcultural experience of the subordinate group, our findings reveal that specific patterns of subcultural participation mean not only the pursuit of distinctive value and meaning at the subcultural level, but also cultural strategies for young people to negotiate their societal status problem in the rest of the society. For students in lower-ranked high schools, the accumulation of recognized subcultural capital was also a way for them to seek equal footing with the academic elite in the leisure sphere. The latter functioned to symbolically compensate their sense of relative deprivation created by their status problem in the rest of society. Under this circumstance, following the mode of musical operation recognized by the dominant group became an inescapable subcultural choice for the subordinated group, which in turn reinforced the status of relevant subcultural repertoires as legitimate subcultural capital. The social logic of subcultural capital and the patterns of cultural distinction in the subcultural field, therefore, would also be mediated by the participants' "non-subcultural" problem, which is far more complicated than merely the operation of the media and cultural industry as presented in Thornton's analysis.

It is hoped this thesis demonstrates that the outcome of the proposed theoretical attempt is fruitful. The proposed analytical strategy in this thesis allows us to deploy a more flexible way to reformulate the classical propositions of CCCS's subcultural theory, like symbolic resistance, problem solving and their relationship to wider patterns of social division. By integrating core elements in Bourdieu's theoretical framework, we can thus "put subcultures into the fields" at different levels. On the one hand, we can see how the properties of different field positions of the subcultural participants in the wider society mediates different kinds of social reward or punishment for their subcultural engagement; on the other hand, this strategy also allows us to reveal how particular structural conditions which subcultural participants are facing in their broader social lives shape the patterns and the meaning of their subcultural engagement, hence contributing to the shaping of the opportunity structure and value hierarchy within the subcultural field.

The second implication to draw from this research is concerning the active role of the educational process in shaping patterns of youth (sub)cultures and groupings.

Schooling mechanisms such as ranking, exam-taking, and student groups are central to the everyday activities of most young people. However, these aspects are obviously under-examined in youth cultural studies in the West. Such a theoretical absence reduces the usefulness of relevant research tools in exploring the context where schooling plays an important role in young people's everyday lives. The marginalized status of "school-related mechanisms" in western subcultural studies relates to some methodological bias in the recent developments of youth culture studies. On the one hand, while recent studies of (post)subcultures usually focus on spectacular styles, their research tends to focus on "internal social mechanisms," such as "venues," "events," "the media," and the collectively shared symbolic system through which the subculture's members are grouped together (see, for example, Hodkinson, 2004 and Thornton, 1995). In these studies, the relationship between patterns of subcultural participation and external social mechanisms such as the educational institution, job market, and family are not given sufficient attention. On the other hand, most studies of youth culture and transition—the so-called "defenders" of subculture (Hodkinson, 2015)—tend to be more interested in economically deprived youth, while "other categories of young people, like service workers, further and higher education students, privileged professional workers and studies of middle class youth in general" are neglected (Hollands, 2002: 160). In particular, the subjects of these studies are usually those with weaker connections to the education system, such as students who've been early drop-outs or school leavers (see, for example, McDonald et al., 2005; Shildrick, 2006; McDonald and Shildrick, 2007; McDonald and Marsh, 2001). As a result, the school-related mechanisms only take a peripheral position in their research.

As already shown in this thesis, the educational process plays a critical role in shaping the specific contours and contents of Taiwanese youth subcultures that cannot be fully illuminated by other primary social differences such as class, gender, or ethnic differences. In particular, while the admission to high school and university is mainly dictated by the results of entrance exams in which close-ended questions comprise the major form of testing, the exam-oriented educational system is thus commonly perceived as a more equal and objective system and hence can effectively be

independent from other primary social differences and facilitate social mobility.⁵² Under this circumstance, education in Taiwan is institutionally mediated by the exams to be a powerful logic of social differentiation based on the rigid, fixed test ranking, further constituting one powerful principle of social division and subcultural formation.⁵³ This, as already stated in Chapter 1, can be best exemplified by the significantly greater weight of educational background in the attribution of social differences in Taiwanese rock bands than the other principles of differences. Similarly, in the high school field, school ranking and status is also the most powerful logic of the formation and differentiation of youth leisure grouping. In Taipei, for example, the pattern of both the formation of the inter-school alliances and inter-school exchange of many sorts of student club activities is also based on school ranking differences. As shown in Chapters 6 and 9, student leisure groups tend to interact or make alliance with similar groups from schools of similar academic ranking, which reproduces the academic hierarchy within the subcultural spheres. A clear contrast to this pattern is, for example, the rock club of DF high school, which is a newly established, community-based high school (somewhat analogous to the state school in England) located in the suburban area of New Taipei City. The recruitment of prospective students to this type of school is based less on academic record and more on region. According to the interview data, the way DF high school members organize inter-school activities is also regionally based rather than ranking based; that is to say, while the pattern of the inter-school exchange of the majority of the high school rock clubs

⁵² For example, in the ongoing debate over the Multiroute Admission Program, the most common objection to the policy of decreasing the importance of the centralized admission exam is based on the discourse that such an institutional change would be much more advantageous to upper-class families. However, evidence has shown the exam is the most unfavorable institutional platform for underprivileged groups.

⁵³ Therefore, it is still a common phenomenon that in more rural, undeveloped areas if a youth scores high enough in their exams to gain entry to elite high schools or elite universities, there will be certain rituals—lighting firecrackers, feasting with the neighbors—to celebrate and praise such a symbolic rise from the periphery or from poverty. For the rich, it is also a celebratable honor if children in the family gain prominent achievement in their entrance exams, as this represents real strength in the seemingly objective evaluation, which cannot be directly obtained through economic capital.

in the center of Taipei city are based on the degree of closeness of school ranking, student members of the DF rock club tend to interact more with similar clubs of other community-based high schools located in nearer areas. Such a difference clearly illustrates that, in Taiwan, patterns of the formation of youth subculture are shaped by the school admission mechanism.

Moreover, my findings suggest that young people's subcultural engagement would also be shaped by the specific institutional arrangements in their educational career. As shown in Chapter 7, in the specific time structure which was constituted by core educational institutional arrangements, students tended to adopt a more instrumental strategy to engage in their rock activity, which was in parallel to the way they prepared for academic exams. On the one hand, the temporal arrangement of student gigs was constrained by the school calendar which is punctuated by significant school events such as end-term exams, upgrading, and the university entrance exam. With the collective aim of achieving the best before the final year which would be solely devoted to revising for the university entrance exam, particular modes of musical operation perceived as more easily "rankable" than others appeared to students as the necessary subcultural choices, regardless of the previous musical taste of each member. On the other hand, when practicing their instruments, the aforementioned institutional arrangements in this transitional process also encouraged students to replicate common exam-culture learning repertoires in their rock subculture, like austerity, pre-studying, and cram-schooling. Their leisure career also brought substantial implications for their educational career. The concentration in the sphere of "play" during the first two years of high school also meant KCRC students needed to adopt a more instrumental strategy in academic learning during the final year—that is, more practice tests, cram-schooling, and focusing only on what might be tested while excluding knowledge irrelevant to exams.

Education's exceptional importance is not exclusive to Taiwanese society. In several other East Asian societies, including South Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, China, and Singapore, education plays an equally important role in mediating social stratification and shaping specific patterns of social life. In this region, the formation of youth groups is more prevalently based on the social division between students of "good" and "bad" schools. Such a pattern of social division is institutionally informed by the exam system, while the impact brought by the primary social division might to

some extent be symbolically restrained (Byun et al., 2012; Huang, 1994; Minamida, 2014). Japanese education scholar Sato Manabu uses the theoretical concept of “compressed modernization” to illuminate how the exam-oriented educational process is so important in these countries (Manabu, 2012, 2013). He argues that while it took these East Asian countries only a hundred years, or even half that time, to arrive at the point of economic development and modernization it has taken western counterparts at least two to three centuries to reach, a highly efficient educational system has been developed for East Asian societies to go through the compressed process of modernization. In this developmental process, the exam-oriented sorting mechanism was developed to meet such a requirement. Under this mechanism, the more one can achieve in exams, the higher educational achievement he/she can obtain, and hence the better one’s job opportunities (ibid.). While exam achievement has been constructed as nearly the only legitimate way to allow one to break away from their original social strata and environment, education becomes the only means for children to move upward. Under this circumstance, relevant institutional arrangements such as ranking and exam results exert particular ideological force, along with a series of institutional arrangements and cultural practices⁵⁴, and hence become a powerful mechanism of social differentiation and discrimination in East Asian societies.

In his book *Practical Reason*, Bourdieu uses the phrase “comparativism of the essential” to address the issue of the different weighting that several social differences might play in shaping the patterns of objective differences and relevant symbolic system and cultural distinction in different social contexts. He suggests the remarkable significance of education in Japanese society might be a good entry to apply the model of field theory in the other “particular case of possible”:

I hope my readers will try to apply the model in this other “particular case of possible,” that is, Japanese society, that they will try to construct Japanese social space and symbolic space, to define the basic principles of objective differentiation (I think they are the same, but one should verify whether, for instance, they do not have different relative weights—I do not think so, given the

⁵⁴ Including ability grouping, reinforcement of differentiation between successful and failed students through labeling, the suppression of any other sources of a sense of accomplishment other than school success, and so forth.

exceptional importance which is traditionally attributed to education in Japan) and especially the principles of distinction, the specific distinctive signs in the domains of sport, food, drink, and so on, the relevant features which make for significant differences in the different symbolic subspaces. This is, in my opinion, the condition for a comparativism of the essential that I called for at the beginning, and at the same time, for the universal knowledge of the invariants and variations that sociology can and must produce. (Bourdieu, 1998: 13)

Although this thesis is based on the Taiwanese case, it reflects many common educational problems with the aforementioned East Asian countries under the compressed modern situation, including (following Sato Manabu) excessive competition, over-emphasis on quantity over quality, and instrumental learning. As can be seen in the analysis of this thesis (Chapter 7), these problems have extended from the sphere of academic exams to other fields of social practice which are clearly represented, even in the way students learn to play rock instruments. Exploring the intricate relationship between the education system and youth (sub)cultures, however, can be beneficial not only to the studies in the East Asian region. For the majority of young people worldwide, school is arguably the center of their everyday activities, and the institutional arrangements of schooling such as schoolwork, exams, courses, and campus activities shape students' time-use patterns and their future trajectory. As France and Threadgold argue, "schools are key sites ... and have a critical shaping role in what is possible for the youth. Many of the processes and systems at the mesosystem level around education directly involve the young" (2016: 621). In western studies of youth, many potentially formative social and cultural conditions associated with the relationship between the detailed institutional arrangement around education and young people's cultural life are worthy of further exploration. For example, what are the (sub)cultural differences between the leisure life of boarding-school pupils and state-school pupils in the UK? What can best explain the similarities and differences in the patterns of the subcultural participation in these different educational settings? This is not to say that the educational system should be treated as the ultimate explanation in studying youth culture, but is rather a call for more attention to the nuances such an approach could offer, moving beyond the focus on primary social divisions.

Finally, the findings in this thesis can also promote substantial reflection on several current educational policy debates in Taiwanese societies. As already stated in Chapters 3 and 7, from 2012 onward, there had been a series of policy debates on the issue of the extension of compulsory education from nine years to twelve years (12-Year Compulsory Education, 十二年國民基本義務教育). The rationale behind this policy is to alleviate the excessive educational competition, hierarchization of high school education, and the growing pressures caused by intensive rote learning and cram-schooling, as well as to promote diverse learning over the traditional pattern of exam-oriented learning. To achieve these aims, the decrease in the weight of the centralized high school entrance exam—and the eventual abolition of it—in high school admission was designed to be one significant institutional change. As such an arrangement obviously threatened the existence of elite high schools, it provoked huge opposition from parental groups (particularly those of elite high school students, or those who were academically superior in junior high schools and very likely to study in elite high schools) and students and graduates of elite high schools. Many junior-high and elite senior-high school students even assembled to protest against the agenda, along with more and more discriminatory discourse voiced by the elite high school students⁵⁵ such as “why do we need to be in the same classroom with failed scum?”,⁵⁶ and “what if we end up with being in the same classroom with those who don’t even know the 26 English letters?”⁵⁷

This situation was soon followed by a series of intensive debates along with a newly invented term “Chien-Pei (the abbreviation of the combination of Chien-Kuo Senior High School and Taipei First Girls High School) Phenomenon” which refers to the obvious discriminatory behavior and sense of superiority displayed by elite high school students. In response, some educational reform groups organized a series of conference and media debates to emphasize the necessity of reducing the hierarchization of high school education. More and more elite high school students and graduates began to defend their position and the legitimacy of the existence of

⁵⁵ Particularly students of the best boys’ high school and the best girls high school in Taipei, Chien-Kuo Senior High School and Taipei First Girls High School.

⁵⁶ Wang (2012, June) Is it An Elitist Phenomenon or An Elitist Illusion? *Humanistic Education Journal*.

⁵⁷ Shi (2012, July) Chien-Bei Phenomenon. *Humanistic Education Journal*.

elite high schools. As already mentioned in Chapter 7, many of them contended that the learning environments in elite high schools had long broken away from the stereotyped image that students' learning practice are dictated by exams; instead, in better-ranked schools, students enjoy much more leeway for developing non-academic habits and even engaging in seemingly rebellious subcultural activities.

A series of interesting questions can be asked in the light this debate. Why would the students in turn defend such an oppressive educational system which makes them suffer the endless cycle of intensive rote learning and cram-schooling? Are elite high schools, which have long been considered the source of excessive competition and educational hierarchization, in fact genuine places for diverse and autonomous learning? Since the beginning of the debate and up to the present day, these questions have not been properly explored either practically or academically. Particularly for the seemingly inexplicable phenomenon of elite high school students' subculture of the pursuit of dual excellence in both play and study ("most elite students are instead those who spend the most time in the sphere of subcultural activities"), neither the academics nor the educational reform groups have made any effective response. The only response was the derogatory epithet "video-game elite" made by Shi Ying, the chairman of the Humanistic Education Foundation,⁵⁸ who is also a retired mathematics professor from the National Taiwan University. By this term, he argues elite high school students' collective enthusiasm for competition in the spheres of both study and play is very much similar to video-game competition: "apart from differentiating the winners from the losers, there are not any psychologically meaningful aspects to these activities" (Shiyin, 2012: 2–3).

Based on the findings in this thesis, however, such a derogatory critique may just reflect another kind of elitism, and is not productive in making any proper sense of the phenomenon. Shiyin fails to recognize that, for these elite youth, the seemingly meaningless ranking and competition in the superficial spheres of play not only constitute their self-identity, but also create specific meaning for their daily schooling practice, allowing the students to subjectively perceive that they can make accomplishments in both academic and subcultural fields and hence break away from

⁵⁸ A non-profit organization dedicated to the development of human-centered education in Taiwan.

the mundane predictability of the educational regime. This, it is argued, can only be grasped through a deep ethnography in students' daily activity. Via the case of KCRC, this thesis attempts to propose a new direction for understanding the issues of elite high schools and the educational system in Taiwan. Particularly in the post-educational reform era, the ethnographic details in the school club-based youth subcultures are helpful in understanding the collective identity of elite high school students and the unprecedented methods of operation of the exam-oriented educational system. We can do this by looking at how the logic of status struggle is extended from academic exams to the spheres of subcultural activities, and how this helps modify and reinforce the dominant logic of ranking and competition in the existing educational regime.

In fact, there have been more and more educational phenomena which cannot be explained by the traditional perspective in which the spheres of study and play are presumed to be two mutually conflicting areas of activity in students' lives. For example, the relationship between cram-schooling and students' schooling life has gradually changed after the rise of school club culture. On the one hand, academic cram-schooling can even be strategically appropriated by students as a means of struggling for more space in the engagement in subcultural activities.⁵⁹ On the other hand, academic cram-schools also utilize the organizational platform of student clubs to recruit students, as well as patronize students' club activity as a means of exchange for students' enrollment in the cram-school courses. (For example, KCRC students told me if there are at least five members of a student club prepaying the tuition fee for the third-year course in the cram-school, the cram-school would provide financial support for the club to organize a club event—such as an annual concert; this is, to some extent, similar to the concept of commissioning.)

Under this circumstance, it might be problematic to treat cram-schooling as merely an indicator of students' study pressure; such new social meanings and functions of cram-schooling to students can only be captured by the first-hand ethnography in students' daily culture. In addition, according to my fieldwork data, some cram-schools even try to develop affective bonds with students as a way to

⁵⁹ In an 2012 editorial article, one KC high school graduate stated that the practice of cram-schooling allowed them to make early preparation for the exams so as to save more time for engaging in school club activities. (JS CK36rd, 2012).

expand their business, by sending some of their staff, who are young and even sexually attractive, to get close to students, and participate in or support students' club activities.⁶⁰ The practices of the cram-school staff can be said to be somewhat similar to some techniques in ethnography, which are deployed to understand the cultural needs of students by socializing with them on a more personal level. This has certainly created an ironic phenomenon: while policymakers and educational scholars are endeavoring to alleviate the notorious cram-schooling phenomenon, the cram-schooling industry has already kept several steps ahead of the former by permeating students' subcultural lives in an attempt to maintain their business.

This situation points to the urgent need for a deeper understanding of the patterns in local youth's learning practice and cultural life, which can't be covered by the top-down perspectives in both policymaking and academic discourses. While most discussions are focused on the narrow aspects of students' learning—academic subjects, school pedagogy, and cram-schooling—there has been an obvious omission in seeing how the general learning pattern of young people are framed by the interplay between their cultural engagement and academic study at a more holistic level. My hope is that this thesis may provide a useful starting point to revisit the problematic issues concerning young people's everyday learning practice and the local educational regime: through the detailed examination of how students “play,” a more holistic understanding of the deeper social implication of the existing educational institution to students' everyday practice and learning can thus be approached.

One obvious limit of this study may be the restricted case which focuses mainly on one type of youth leisure. However, the methodological strategy to examine young people's rock practices through a broader subcultural milieu shared by young people of similar structural position gives us confidence in the findings of this thesis relating

⁶⁰ At nearly every club event organized by elite boys' high schools, a female tutor, Miss X, from one particular cram-school, would show up at the venue in support of the students' event. Once, Miss X clearly mentioned to me, that her and the other cram-school staff members' work task was to “help students to play well in the sphere of club activity in the first and the second years of study, and support them to earn an excellent exam result in the third year of study.” Interestingly, she also particularly mentioned that they focus on students' learning practice “exam skills,” because in the current educational system “nobody really cares about studying.”

to the broader patterns of the everyday life practice of Taiwanese elite youth. Moreover, although the number of examples is rather limited, the discovery of similar subcultural tendencies in other types of youth leisure groups suggests that the theoretical implications of this research may effectively go beyond the sphere of rock subcultures. This is not to say that the revealed patterns of youth learning and subcultural engagement in this study can be applied wholesale to other types of youth leisure. However, I see the proposed framework in this thesis as a tentative scheme which allows us to uncover the broader “webs of significance” that encourage the similar subcultural tendency in different types of youth subcultural groups in which their members share a similar structural condition and social problems. It is hoped that this could be a new direction with rich potential for studies of youth cultures, learning practices, and educational regimes, both locally, translocally, and globally. I would encourage more future research, not only on other types of youth leisure or subcultural groups, but also on the variations in the patterns of the relationship between young people’s cultural life and educational engagement, under distinct educational regimes in different geographic regions.

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